

THE ARGOSY.

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THE TOWER GARDENS.

By L. ALDRIDGE.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

SYMPATHY.

"OH, Mac ! There must be people !" whispered Jessie, as she and he passed the baize doors and caught the hum of voices in the drawing-room.

"Then let me go at once," said Mac.

"But if it's my father !" said Jessie. "You must see him, mustn't you ?"

"For one moment only, then !" said Mac wearily, and Jessie, opening the drawing-room door, found, it seemed to her, quite a large gathering.

Mrs. Bayliss had returned, but still was wearing her bonnet and mantle. She had drawn a chair up to the open window; opposite her was a man, whom Jessie did not recognise, who had drawn another chair up to the window.

Alison was pouring out tea at a small table, John Harbuckle and Mr. Woolcomb were sitting near her; the whole of them, however, were listening to Arthur Bayliss, who, cup in hand, held the hearthrug—was standing on it, I mean—and also the attention of all the company.

He was spinning them an African yarn, and he yarned extremely well.

Jessie shrank from the scene; it looked too festive for her, but she knew she must face it.

The entrance of Jessie and Mac put a temporary end to Arthur Bayliss's anecdote. He looked up at Jessie, who at once went to him.

"Father," she said, under her voice, "here is Mac."

Arthur Bayliss put his cup into his left hand and offered Mac his right.

"How are you?" he asked; "all right again, I hope." For himself he was just then quite at his best.

"Thanks, I'm getting along," said Mac; "this"—and he touched the black patch—"this is worrying me a little just now."

"An awkward place to be hit in," observed Bayliss.

"Yes," assented Mac, looking round for Jessie, who had gone to fetch him some tea, "yes, but it's healing fairly. Thank you, Jessie. No, I won't stay."

And he drank off the tea and went abruptly, after promising Jessie to see her again in a day or two.

"Jessie, don't you remember Major Merriman?" asked Mrs. Bayliss, indicating the man who was sitting opposite her.

"You called on us one day at Cauldknowe, a very long time ago, didn't you?" asked Jessie, suddenly remembering him.

"Yes; I suppose I'm a good deal changed since then, and, bless me! why, you're quite grown up!" exclaimed the Major, as if greatly amazed at the astounding fact.

Jessie said she supposed she was no longer a little girl, and, as soon as possible, retreated into the shade of the curtain, as she was in no humour for conversation just then.

Arthur Bayliss recommenced his yarn; few things gave him greater pleasure than to have the undivided attention of an audience.

"And there we saw the poor wretch bobbing up and down, and drifting further and further away from the ship, and the albatrosses flapping over him."

"Father, how can you repeat such awful things," said Jessie, from the shade of the curtain. "What a horrible story!"

"It's quite true, though; and I remember on another occasion—" and off he went on to some more horrors, during the telling of which Jessie quietly slipped away.

"You were sitting behind the curtain, so you lost sight of the little Major's expression while Uncle Arthur was talking," said Alison, some time afterwards to Jessie. "That was a pity; the little Major's expression was indeed well worth seeing."

There are, as a very small amount of observation will convince us, majors and majors. All majors are not tall and spare, with shaven cheeks and a heavy moustache. Major Merriman, whose age was probably forty-six or thereabout, was a round little man, who had managed to preserve an almost infantile freshness of countenance. As Arthur Bayliss spoke, the Major looked across at him with the guileless wonderment of a boy of six, who for the first time hears a shark or alligator story. No one could think then of him as the hero of those tremendous adventures he sometimes recounted to confiding friends. He could talk about tigers as well as any man in her Majesty's Service. He had the roundest, smoothest face imaginable,

upon which many years of Indian life had left scarcely a trace, and a couple of round, childish eyes, that had looked quite shy and startled when Jessie spoke to him. He was a most singularly unspoiled-looking little creature, was this little Major Merriman, this comparatively elderly "Age of Innocence."

Half-an-hour before Mac and Jessie had come in Mrs. Bayliss had returned.

She had been out shopping, for now, what with her own pension, and the unencumbered rent at Cauldknowe, and no Jessie to buy for, she felt herself justified in occasionally spending a little money on dress and so on for herself and Alison. She liked spending money, but shopping made her very weary.

She was in the most delightful temper when Jessie came home, but half-an-hour before she had been tired and in the very worst of humours. What had caused the difference? Simply this:

As she went up to the baize door, on her return, what should she see but a man coming away from it.

A glance sufficed to show her it was not John Harbuckle, nor poor, dear Arthur, nor that wretched old Woolcomb, nor any other of John's cronies.

He came down a stair or two, he raised his hat, which was nearly covered by a deep mourning band, and simultaneously both exclaimed :

"It must be Major Merriman!"

"Mrs. Bayliss, how are you?"

And the Major, when he spoke, took the widow's dark-gloved hand and pressed it between his own; for he was one of those men with softly-padded palms, who invariably press a woman's hand whenever they have the chance.

"Major Merriman, I'm delighted to see you!" exclaimed Mrs. Bayliss, her weariness vanishing like the mists of dawn before the rising sun. "How fortunate I happened to return! Was no one at home? Well, come upstairs and tell me all the news. It is years since we met."

He followed her into the drawing-room. Mrs. Bayliss drew up a chair to the narrow, old-fashioned window, and indicated the opposite one to her visitor.

"Let me see: you and Bayliss were at Malta with us, weren't you? I am at Woolwich now. In fact I have a staff appointment," said the Major, taking the chair.

"You were always so lucky!" sighed Mrs. Bayliss, thinking of her poor James and of his many and signal failures.

"Ah, don't say so!" returned the Major, with even a heavier sigh than Mrs. Bayliss's, his limpid eyes clouding over like a grieved child's; "you have heard of my great loss?"

Mrs. Bayliss did not speak, but simply inclined her head in token of her acknowledgment of the sad fact.

"You remember my poor Emma? She was with us at Malta," he said, very sorrowfully.

"I do indeed!" said Mrs. Bayliss with sympathetic emphasis.

"Indeed I do; she tried to flirt with my husband," she added to herself.)

"When did it happen?" asked the widow under her voice.

"Just four months ago this very day. I can't get over it," he said, with simple grief.

"One cannot," she returned, with emotion, thinking not of the Major's late wife, but of the grave beside the Birren.

"One cannot! No, one cannot!" he added. There was a pause, a very speaking silence, and then the Major drew out a locket that was attached to a jet guard, opened it, and showed it to the widow, without uttering a word.

Mrs. Bayliss looked at it attentively, and again sighed.

"It does not do her justice," she murmured, in a carefully modulated voice.

"What could?" asked the poor widower.

Then he carefully closed the locket and gazed sadly out of the window.

He was in the deepest mourning, in a suit of the blackest black, with a waistcoat of almost clerical cut, and a black stock with a jet pin in it; and he wore his late wife's wedding ring upon his little finger.

Mrs. Bayliss, although it was not far from two years since the Captain's death, was still in the first weeds.

She thought it would be a relief to the Major to talk about his late Emma, so she drew him on to a recital of her illness and death; and then told him a great deal about her own late James.

"Poor Bayliss!—Poor Bayliss! Good kind fellow!" ejaculated the Major; "and has he really been gone so long? Nearly two years?"

"Six hundred and ninety-five days," said Mrs. Bayliss, with emphasis.

"As long as that!" exclaimed the little Major, opening his startled eyes to their widest extent.

"Six hundred and ninety-five days," repeated Mrs. Bayliss, then she too looked sadly out of the window, and rested her glance on the new barracks of the Tower.

The little Major was deeply touched.

"Poor Bayliss!" he murmured sympathetically; "poor Bayliss!"

"And you are living near Woolwich now, I suppose?" asked Mrs. Bayliss, turning towards him again.

"Yes, I've a house on the Common," he replied.

"Ah! That was where I first met poor James," said Mrs. Bayliss.

"It is a very comfortable little house," said the Major. "I have a

sister living with me. You remember her, I daresay ; she is—she was engaged to a gunner, Charlie Duke ; it was broken off. He left his bones in Ashantee, poor fellow. Lettie takes care of me and my boy, but"—and he found a difficulty in getting any further.

"And how did you happen to hear of us ?" asked Mrs. Bayliss, coming to the rescue.

"I've often wondered what had become of you all. I often said to poor Emma, 'Now, do write to Cauldknowe and ask how they all are ;' but, poor thing, her health was so bad and everything was such a trouble to her that the letter was put off and put off, until at last it was never written. I happened to be over at the Tower upon business this morning and I heard of you from a man who had been in the 160th, so I made up my mind to call at once. I'm glad you all seem so—"

Just then Alison and the other two earth-worms arrived, followed, after a few minutes, by Arthur Bayliss, whom the Major was extremely astonished to see.

"Why, I thought you went to the bottom of the sea years ago," he exclaimed.

"That was another Arthur Bayliss ; I've been out in Africa," returned the wanderer with quiet self-possession.

"And I in India."

Then, as is the nature of men who have lived long abroad, they easily drifted into yarning.

Mr. Woolcomb, with whom during the recent walk John Harbuckle had had several differences of opinion, presently departed, laden with the three books he had just picked up at a stall, and sundry small bags of dainties for his invalid wife ; but the Major lingered on. It might have been the charm of Arthur Bayliss's eloquence, or it might have been the comfort of Mary's silent sympathy ; but certain it is he lingered. Certain also is it that John Harbuckle afterwards observed to himself :

"I think Mary is already much benefited by her stay here. The improvement is doubtless attributable to her comparative freedom from carking care and petty annoyances. I really thought her quite good-looking as she sat by the window listening to Arthur Bayliss this afternoon. Poor Mary, what a pretty girl she used to be !"

Mary was in a perfectly lovely frame of mind for the whole of the Sunday, a day which, in the City at any rate, is apt to be rather trying to some people ; and which was, as a rule, especially so to Mrs. Bayliss, who at all times hated it there.

Mrs. Bayliss had talked to the Major freely about the late Captain, and it had done here a great deal of good ; she felt very much the better for it. She had spoken more freely to the Major on this subject than she had ever been able to do to John Harbuckle or Arthur Bayliss.

And Major Merriman had been very sympathetic.

CHAPTER XL.

PARTINGS.

"AND when do you think you will be back from Norway, Mac?" asked Jessie, when Mac came to bid her good-bye.

"That just depends upon circumstances," Mac answered. "If he gives me too much trouble I shall return at once; if not, we will try to make out the fine weather. I should think, though, two months would be the very longest. And now, Jessie, you are not to worry yourself about me; you understand, darling. You see, I am much better already, and this trip will be all I need to set me up thoroughly. Nothing could be more fortunate. You promise not to worry yourself?"

"Yes," said Jessie resolutely. "If you really are better, I won't. Only I know it was paining you dreadfully on Saturday."

"Yes, it was, most atrociously; but it's better again now. I don't think there is the slightest cause for anxiety."

"Would you tell me if there were?" asked Jessie, turning up her face to his with half a smile on her lips, but a penetrating gravity in her eyes.

His own softened as they met her gaze.

"Could I ever hide anything from you?" he asked, kissing her.

"That's no answer to my question!" said she, with a more persistent steadiness than he had expected.

"Believe me, dear, there is nothing to be frightened about. Never fear that I could hide anything from you, Jessie; I tell you I could no more keep a secret from you than I could fly."

"Ah! But you might be afraid of hurting me," said Jessie.

"Well, you'd not have me be *not* afraid of hurting you? Eh?" And Mac tried to turn the subject. "Of course I shall always be afraid of hurting you; should I be a man if it were not so?"

"Shall I tell you what would hurt me most of all?" asked Jessie, still with that same persistent gravity.

"Yes, if you like," said Mac, with assumed gaiety. "My sweetest! Don't look so anxious; I'm not worth it, Jessie!" he added, quite huskily.

"Yes, you are," she said, with simple directness, for she was feeling much too grave for play then. "Oh, Mac, dear, nothing would ever hurt me like *not being told!*"

"Then you *shall* be told, Jessie—don't you believe me?—you shall be told when there is anything to tell. There now, I promise! Won't you believe me? or are you going to be the first person that has ever doubted my word? Don't you know I've always been called 'honest old Mac?'"

They were standing before John Harbuckle's ancestral Lord Mayor; Jessie, with a hand on each of Mac's arms.

Mac looked down upon her with such frank, truthful love that she was obliged to say, playfully dropping into the Birrendale accent, although the fear in her heart would not be still :

"Nae, I'll just trust ye, Mac!"

The ancestral Lord Mayor has not revealed Mac's reply ; probably it was not given in words.

Mac had but little time to give to adieux. He and Jessie had to be satisfied with a brief interview.

After it was over, when the clock on the old mantelpiece told Mac he must stay no longer, they went up to John Harbuckle's den, and there they found him conversing earnestly with Jessie's father, who was smoking a cigar.

Mac shook hands with both ; they both wished him a good journey, and good-bye ; then immediately after he was gone resumed their conversation, which was not at all antiquarian.

In the drawing-room they found Alison and her mother, and also Major Merriman, who looked as startled when Mac bade them all farewell as if his going had not been the theme of Mrs. Bayliss's discourse at the very moment when she was interrupted by the entrance of Mac and Jessie.

"The colour of Mrs. Bayliss's hair puts me in mind of the Swedish girls. Ah, I wonder if they'll be half as charming as those idols of my youth, the Viennese. Do you remember how awfully, frantically jealous you were of those Viennese girls I met at Nice ? They were just perfection ! How I wish I were going to Nice instead of Norway !" said Mac, as they went downstairs together.

"Perhaps," said Jessie, nodding her head, as she used to do very frequently in the braefoot days, "perhaps I may go to a ball or two at Woolwich next season. Perhaps—by-the-by, I forgot to tell you I saw young Johnstone—Captain he is now—going into the Tower only yesterday. He's quartered there ; Major Merriman heard of us through him. Ha ! ha ! Mr. Mac ! "

"Ha ! ha ! Miss Jessie ! "

"Of course, if you are going away, I must flirt with someone else ! Ah, Mac ! I remember one night while you were at Nice, I said to myself, 'Now, I don't know where he is, but I'm quite sure what he's doing—flirting, of course ! ' and, by your own confession, I was right."

"Never no more, Jessie, never no more !" exclaimed Mac.

"Until next time ! eh, Mac ? "

This last remark was made down at the hall-door, which was then closed ; so they managed to have one little game of play before they again grew serious and parted.

Jessie stood at the door looking after him until he was lost to her, and then she ran upstairs and cried her heart out.

As for Mac, the merry twinkle all died out of his eyes as he turned away from John Harbuckle's door-step in Trinity Square. Mac

steadily plodding along Tower Street looked a good deal older, somehow, than the Mac Carruthers who had stood in the biting east wind on the red step at Cauldknowe which Janet had made so beautiful, in her own esteem, with red ochre and whiting. Perhaps he was sad at leaving Jessie, perhaps it was the effect of that black patch on his forehead, or perhaps it was Langdyke ; certainly much of his blitheness was gone. What of that ?—he was young enough for it all to come back again.

But if he were less blithe than on that day when Jessie had heard the trot of his horse coming down the avenue, there was a depth of happiness in his heart he had not dreamed of then. There was, indeed, a twinge of agony when he turned away from Jessie to which the physical pain of Saturday seemed as nothing ; but underneath all there was a happiness, a bliss, that made him greatly and gently humble.

“ Who am I that I should be so much loved, and by so sweet a girl ? ” he said, in the innermost depths of his heart. “ I’m not worthy of her ! I told her the very truth, I’m not worthy of her. Oh, I hope I may be ! ” That last aspiration was very like a prayer.

An hour later Mac was sitting in a drawing-room in Eaton Square, talking, under his voice, to an elderly couple, the parents of that “ sublimely foolish woman ” who loved Donaldson of Langdyke.

It was a large double drawing-room. A grand piano was at the further end of the room, Donaldson was seated at it, *she* was standing by him, turning over the leaves of a book of Mendelssohn’s duets. Presently they began singing, “ I would that my love, ” perhaps the most sympathetic of all.

There is something strange about that duet which one hears so often sung, and so rarely well sung.

I have heard that duet murdered by good singers with fine voices ; I also remember it as the most exquisite of all sweet music as it used to be simply given, without accompaniment, by two sisters, or by a brother and sister, who had scarcely a voice between them, on summer evenings, sitting on a ledge of an open window overlooking the Thames. It is a theory of mine (of no value, but “ mine own, ”) that the perfect accord which that duet demands can only be obtained by members of the same family. There was a remote consanguinity between Donaldson and the woman who was singing with him, they both possessed the family voice ; there was also between them that other sympathy of which Heine’s words speak.

It struck Mac, but it may have been because his own feelings were so strongly excited, it struck him that he had never before heard such perfect tunableness. She had a pure soprano, he as pure a tenor ; two strings of one clear harp. They loved music, they loved each other—in the song they were one.

The whispered conversation ceased as that one voice in its two

sweet tones rose together. Mac looked across the long rooms to the piano that stood before a mass of flowers and foliage, with a grave and infinite pity.

He was not highly imaginative, the type did not immediately and distinctly suggest its antitype to his mind; but he was vaguely conscious of two lovers singing on the brink of hell, gazing up the while into the heaven that one of them had lost.

There she stood, Donaldson's guardian angel, and sang with him.

She had a sorrowful white face, clearly and strongly drawn; she stood almost as still as a statue, one slender bare arm hanging by her side, the other raised to the book on the stand, her tall figure draped in clinging china crape of the softest white. He sat at the piano, pressing the keys of the instrument with his long fingers, and lifting his face towards her as she sang. He looked then fair and almost handsome, and his voice had a pathos in it that would have sent a thrill through the most unsensitive heart.

"I would like to save that fellow!" Mac thought. He looked at the white arm against the white dress; "that wasn't strong enough to hold him!" he said, estimating its strength by the power he knew it would have over himself had it been his Jessie's; "that wasn't strong enough!"

He doubted his own influence; it seemed weak as water in comparison with hers.

"But I'll make a fight for him!" he said, registering an inward vow to allow no self-indulgence on his own part to make him weaker.

The song ceased. Mac turned to the parents and spoke to them for a short time. The two at the other end of the room turned over a few leaves, but sang no more.

"I wonder if they'll ever sing together again?" Mac asked himself, as Donaldson rose, evidently with the intention of leaving.

The lovers had probably bade each other farewell earlier in the day.

She stayed by the piano while he came into the front room, and shook hands with her parents.

Mac shook hands also, and both turned to leave. Donaldson went back to the piano, kissed his good angel as quietly as if she had been his sister, and went away.

The woman who loved him advanced a step or two towards Mac, who was about to wish her good-bye.

She laid a hand on Mac's, it was cold as statuary marble.

"You will do your utmost?" she asked.

There was the sound of chronic heart-break in her voice.

"I will," said Mac, pressing the cold hand with deep feeling.

The sorrowful white face was suddenly covered with a burning blush.

"I could hardly keep him here until you came," she said, her voice husky with shame and tears.

"I will do my utmost," said Mac, greatly moved. "I must go," he went on, and with a hurried bow he left, and caught Donaldson before he had quite time to reach the hall-door.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE CRUISE OF THE "FIREFLY."

"I AM already another being," wrote Mac in his first letter from Christiania, posted the day of the *Firefly's* arrival. "The trip here has very nearly set me up again. The first salmon I catch will complete the cure."

A week later Jessie received another letter from the banks of a stream beyond the sphere of her own very limited geographical researches.

"I caught a fifteen-pounder this morning and am consequently in the best of health and spirits. How delightful it is to feel perfectly well once more! I only need a congenial companion—you, I mean—to be perfectly happy. It is a long while since I have enjoyed anything so much as to-day's sport. Even Donaldson woke up when he saw me playing that fish, and actually helped to land him. I wish he would leave off pulling his moustache; it annoys me, sometimes almost more than I can bear, he pulls it so aimlessly."

"Glorious weather; and so much to remind me of Birrendale and Jessie! You would laugh if you could hear me strumming 'Ye banks and braes' on the piano, in the cabin; Donaldson is teaching me music; he seems fonder of music than of anything else; he goes in for sonatas half-an-hour long when the fit takes him. The way in which he plays a pathetic movement is enough to break one's heart. My performance offers a striking contrast to his; as yet I can only use one finger, the index of my right hand; but I keep on at that one incessantly, hoping to have the tune perfect to play to you on my return."

"Had some trouble with my interesting charge last night. He had a great wish to seek a watery grave, but I was able to meet the case with such forcible physical arguments that he ultimately listened to reason."

"Donaldson all right again. Mac better than ever. Another success—another fine fish."

"Nothing left of accident but a scar."

These were some of the remarks scattered among descriptions of scenery, nautical adventures, journeys inland, and a whole mine of wealth of endearing words and phrases.

They were not all read by Jessie at John Harbuckle's house in Trinity Square, E.C.; some found their way to her in seaside lodgings (for the home authorities managed to effect a compromise),

some followed her to a country house, one she read, for the second time, by a window looking on to Woolwich Common.

"Mac is himself again!" was the comment Jessie made on the correspondence, and Mac being again himself, of course Jessie quickly became again herself.

Thanks to Major Merriman, a considerable variety was introduced into the girls' lives, when October brought him back from an autumnal tour with his son, and Mrs. Bayliss from rather a long visit to Birrendale, which she had been compelled to take on account of certain difficulties with her tenant who would never be satisfied with anything.

Fortunately that tenant took himself off, after obtaining Mrs. Bayliss's permission to sublet Cauldknowe.

Mrs. Bayliss did not take either of the girls with her for very obvious reasons.

The consequence was that, happening to meet Mrs. Carruthers at the Manse one day, that lady asked her to lunch at Muirhead; an invitation Mrs. Bayliss very nearly declined. She would, in fact, have declined it altogether had not Mrs. Carruthers pressed her to come in the most cordial manner possible.

So she went and had lunch with Mrs. Carruthers and half-a-dozen other women, all the men of the party, including the Laird and Alec, having gone to some distant moors for the day's shooting.

Mrs. Bayliss discussed the latest military intelligence during her visit to Muirhead, speaking more frequently of Woolwich than of the Tower. It was observed that she seemed in much better spirits than formerly.

As she drove back to Kirkhope in the very same trap from the "Blue-bell" in which Mac and Jessie had driven on an ever-memorable occasion, Mrs. Bayliss hardly knew whether or not she was pleased or annoyed with her visit to Muirhead; however, that night she wrote John Harbuckle a somewhat gushing account of the affair.

But neither her business worries nor sundry local festivities could tempt Mrs. Bayliss away from her allegiance to the memory of the late Captain. As long as she was in Birrendale fresh flowers adorned his grave.

She wept very much when she left. She had no Alison with her to point out the consoling light on the English border, so she was much depressed all the way to Carlisle. But when she left Carlisle she put up her veil, and had anyone been with her to see, that person might have noticed that she smiled a smile with a good deal of meaning in it as she watched the shadows flitting across the sunlit Westmoreland hills.

If the heart of a widow were like the heart of a widower, one might from that smile have drawn a conclusion with a certainty of its correctness; but widows and widowers are quite different from each

other, so that one must needs hesitate to interpret that meaning ; suffice it to say that, on the return of Mrs. Bayliss from Scotland, Major Merriman was the very first of her visitors, and that when he came he lingered ; when he left he felt life a blank.

Now Jessie had to write to Mac pretty often, once a day at the very least.

These young people had been wise enough not to promise daily letters (the greatest mistake possible) ; but as a matter of fact, they wrote every day and posted when a sufficient number of pages had been written. That is to say, Jessie did so ; Mac, of course, was frequently unable to post.

This constant writing made heavy demands upon Jessie. Sometimes she hardly knew what to put next, and used to appeal to Alison for news ; for, strange as it may appear, even the writers of love letters will now and then run short of ideas. In these straits Mrs. Bayliss and Major Merriman proved an unfailing source of amusement to Jessie and also to Mac, who read out such portions of Jessie's letters as referred to them to Donaldson of Langdyke.

"We lost no time in betting on the subject," wrote Mac from Stockholm : "he bets she will ; I, she won't."

"Alison declares she will stay with Uncle John. Nothing, she says, would induce her to welcome the elderly 'age of innocence' as her father's successor. For myself," wrote Jessie, "I need scarcely say, I think Woolwich Common the most delightful place in the world. I believe auntie secretly prefers it to Cauldknowe, but obstinacy won't allow her to admit as much. When are you coming home? Make haste, for military uniforms are beginning to appear lovely in my eyes."

This letter of Jessie's was followed by an enthusiastic account from Mac of some charming Swedish girls.

"And as you seem so very cheerful without me," Mac went on, "I don't mind telling you that Donaldson last night astounded me by making an original remark :

" 'I've come to the conclusion,' he said, pulling away at his moustache with some degree of vigour, 'that what I require is an interest in life. Now you, you happy beggar, you can get an interest out of anything or nothing—I'm sure I wish I could, for life bores me unutterably. I've had enough of the North ; it's getting cold ; let's go to Africa, or somewhere else in the tropics. I've never been in the tropics yet ; they might be interesting, and are sure to be warm. Let us go at once. I should feel better if I were thoroughly warm.' So I felt it a dreadful disappointment at first, as I had been looking forward to seeing you again very soon ; but, you know, I could only have been with you a few hours after all ; and I really believe Donaldson is much better away from home. I don't suppose we shall be away long, and it's all business to me—all in the day's work, I tell myself ; so it really is bringing me nearer to you. Still I am

terribly disappointed. I should like you to see me now. I am so weather-beaten you would hardly recognise me. Donaldson isn't—he's on the sofa in the cabin the greater part of the day. His laziness is simply inconceivable—he can do nothing by the week together."

"Off Hâvre.—It is frightful to be so near and not to be able to run across the Channel to look at you. But it won't do. The woman who might attract Langdyke to town is in Italy, so he won't go to London and I daren't leave him. I am like the boy who stood on the burning deck, I must stand to my post at all hazards; but how I hunger for a sight of my Jessie words will not express! Why did you abuse me so in your last letter?—etc., etc., etc."

"Madeira.—If you and your father are going to spend the winter here, how I wish you would come at once! How delightful it would be if you were here."

"Teneriffe.—Having heard so much of the beauty of Spanish girls, and knowing they were Spanish here, I resolved to look with a critical eye. They were all hideous to my mind. Thought how well someone I knew would look in a mantilla, so bought one. Donaldson, in a Byronic mood, wrote off not such a bad copy of lurid verses last night. I was incite to scribble also, but my style is not lurid. All I could think of was to rhyme 'gowans' and 'rowans'; but a little refrain that had been knocking about in my brain for some time struck me as worth preserving:

"‘And Jessie with the rowans in her hair.’

"Perhaps Alison will be kind enough to write the rest of the song—which I feel ought to be a very good one—for me. I suppose it was the rose that accompanies the mantilla that suggested the charming line. I suppose I mean to convey that I should prefer the beauty of the brae with a bunch of rowan berries in her hair to——" and so on.

"Off Sierra Leone.—Had a most awful fright the night before last. Was sound asleep on the deck when suddenly there was a yell. I started up in alarm, just in time to see Donaldson spring overboard. Had a boat after him at once, wonder the sharks did not get him, as the water was full of them; managed to save him, but not without difficulty. I wish I could lock him up."

"The Cape.—Donaldson very penitent. Wants to land and go up the country. The scar on my forehead has been giving me some trouble lately. You see how I am keeping my promise. Really, it is only a little lump, not worth mentioning."

"So your father is suffering from the English winter! What a pity you both don't come out to Madeira! How very jolly it would be if you did. We would return to that heavenly island at once, and you could both of you cruise about with us. I am growing dull for want of seeing you."

Another letter or two, in which Mac tried to make Jessie understand what the tropics were like, and then longer intervals of silence.

Then a letter full of the beauty of the Philippine Islands, and nothing about himself. "Why do you never mention yourself now? Why have you dropped yourself out of your letters?" Jessie asked in her reply. Then another considerable interval and a letter from Honolulu.

"I have just met an English doctor here. He strongly urges my immediate return. He thinks I ought to have further advice about that bruise. Donaldson is deeply aggrieved and hurt by my proposing to leave him. However, I have found an old schoolfellow here who will be only too glad to take my place. I shall start as soon as possible. I tell you the truth, I am heartily sick of my charge; although much of the cruise has been most enjoyable. I imagine there cannot be much the matter with me, as I am feeling exceedingly well and as strong as ever. I hope a very little of the right sort of advice will put all straight. To me, by far the worst part of the business is, that I can't help fearing that my darling Jessie will take alarm. I almost wish she had not made me promise to tell her everything. What can I say to keep her from being frightened? I'm not frightened at all myself; because I am taking any mischief that might possibly have arisen so very much in time. The only pain worth speaking of that I feel is, the knowledge that my dearest girl will worry herself; which, if she loves her poor old Mac, she is not to do. You will not get this letter many hours before you see me. Donaldson wishes to bring me back in the *Firefly*, but the yacht can't do the journey in the time of the mail. Donaldson and I have not parted finally. He says I have done him good; I wish I could hope I had, poor fellow, for the sake of the woman who loves him, as well as for his own. There are times when I feel to like him."

Then came a few words not to be scanned by any eyes except Jessie's.

Poor Jessie!—poor Mac!

CHAPTER XLII.

MAC COMES BACK.

Mac's whereabouts was so uncertain that Jessie never knew by what mail to expect a letter from him.

That letter about his immediate return arrived on a Saturday night by the last post.

The girls had been to Richmond with Arthur Bayliss, and both came home very tired.

"Why wait up for the last post?" said Alison. "Nothing ever comes by the last post on Saturday except circulars or bills; it

never brings anything interesting. Come, Jessie, I'm thoroughly tired out."

"So am I, but I must wait," said Jessie, burying her head in the pillow of the drawing-room sofa; "I didn't hear from Mac last week, and in his last letter he never said a word about himself. I'm afraid something must be the matter."

"Oh, you would have been sure to have heard if there had been anything wrong. Ill news flies apace!" returned Alison from the opposite pillow, and in another minute she had fallen asleep.

But Jessie did not sleep; she listened to every sound, and thought of that stroll with Mac in the Tower Gardens now nearly six months ago.

After a while there was the loud rat-tat with the heavy knocker, which no one except the postman ever used.

Jessie sprang up, watched Sarah Jane go downstairs, waylaid her by the baize door, and looked over the letters.

She had not waited up in vain; among the circulars and business letters was one on foreign paper for her.

She ran up with it to her own room, tore it open, hastily looked through it, and then let it drop from her fingers on to the floor.

Alison, coming sleepily into the room a few minutes afterwards, found Jessie sitting by the bedside, gazing straight before her, with the thin pages lying at her feet.

"Jessie!" she exclaimed, suddenly waking up; "Jessie! what's the matter?"

Jessie gave one little cry.

"Oh, Mac's very ill—he's going to die!"

"No, dear, I hope not," said Alison, putting her arms round Jessie. "Let me see the letter—here," and she stooped to pick it up; "let me hear about it."

"What can it mean?—oh, surely something very horrible!" said Jessie, when she had managed to get through the passage in which Mac spoke of his immediate return. "What can it mean? why must he hurry home?"

"Probably it's only the local injury," said Alison, trying to put the best face on the matter. "He says he feels well; it is merely the local injury that requires advice. But he will be back again directly; don't frighten yourself too much until you know what is the matter."

"I don't think I am frightened," said Jessie, with sudden calmness, "only I'm certain he's going to die."

"That's simple folly," said Alison, "there is nothing in his letter to—"

"I am certain of it," said Jessie, much too quietly.

"But you know, darling, you have had so many fancies that have not come true," put in Alison.

"This is no fancy," reiterated Jessie. "He is going to die."

"So are we all," said Alison.

"Ay! but not at twenty-five," said Jessie.

"Why should you think so? Such wonderful things are done in these days; and he's strong and well. Come, Jessie, you can make mistakes sometimes. How wrong you were about him when he didn't come that day he had promised to be here at eleven!"

"I was wrong then!" said Jessie, with a bitter twinge of self-reproach.

"I mention it to show you that you *are* now and then capable of forming wrong conclusions. You shouldn't jump at ideas and think them certainties."

"I was wrong there," repeated Jessie, as if the thought had now brought her some slight comfort.

"Of course you were!" said Alison with decision; "and you very often are wrong. Remember, too, that nothing will pain Mac half so much as seeing you look distressed."

"That he won't see," said Jessie firmly. "How soon can he get home? Go and ask Uncle John how soon Mac can get home. Go quickly, Alie."

Alison went downstairs with a very grave face. John Harbuckle and his sister were sitting by the fire. It was late April again now, but the nights were still chilly.

"This looks like a serious business," said John Harbuckle, with even more of his usual slowness of speech, when Alison had told the news.

"I'm afraid it is so," said Alison.

Mrs. Bayliss, who still wore her white cap, looked across at Alison with a very set face, but was silent.

"How soon can he get home?" asked Alison.

"On Monday, I should say," replied Uncle John. "Dear, dear, dear me! I'm very deeply grieved—very deeply grieved!"

"You *do* think it looks serious then?" asked Alison, under her voice.

"Most decidedly!"

"I'm so sorry for Jessie!" sighed Alison. "She has made up her mind he is going to die."

"She shouldn't do that," said Uncle John; "no, she shouldn't do that. She has no warrant for that."

"May I tell her so?" asked Alison.

"By all means," said John Harbuckle with emphasis.

"Good-night, mother," said Alison, with a kiss.

"Good-night, my sweet child," said Mrs. Bayliss, pressing her daughter to her with most unusual tenderness. "Good-night; try to comfort poor Jessie if you can. God bless you, dear."

"What did they say?" asked Jessie, as soon as Alison re-entered the room.

"Uncle John thinks you may expect Mac on Monday, that is, he may be in England on Monday; and that you are taking far too gloomy a view of the matter."

"Perhaps I am then," said Jessie, as if hardly daring to cherish the returning hope, whose fair face, she could not help feeling, was trying to peep round the corner of her heart.

"At any rate," said Alison, "I would, if I were you, wait until he had heard a physician's verdict."

"I don't believe in doctors," said Jessie; "besides, they never tell one anything. It must be something very serious or they wouldn't hurry him back so. Can he be going blind, do you think?"

"Oh, Jessie darling! what's the use of talking at random?" said Alison.

"I'll try to wait patiently," said Jessie, and was silent: a fervent "Good-night" was all the girls uttered again that day.

They were both a long while going to sleep. All sorts of distorted images of Mac crowded Jessie's mind during the night; when the early bells awoke her on Sunday morning she was weary and unrefreshed.

Arthur Bayliss came round to breakfast.

"An ugly affair," he remarked to John Harbuckle, who told him the news, "I heartily wish that engagement were broken off; mark me, it will never come to any good. It will only be a source of continual worry to Jessie. I shall break it off if I possibly can."

"You won't tell her so, I presume!" said John Harbuckle, with some asperity.

"No, I'll just see how things are likely to go first; but I'm not going to allow her life to be entirely ruined. It is a lovely day, I'll take the girls to church in the country somewhere. Have you a 'Bradshaw?'—I'll look out the trains; you and Mary will come with us?"

"Thank you, I am already engaged—it is my turn to address our school; as for Mary, here she is to answer for herself."

There was a curtness in John Harbuckle's speech that revealed a certain ill-concealed displeasure.

Mary did not choose to go; the two men said but little to each other, and Arthur Bayliss hurried off the girls as soon as possible to Fenchurch Street Station.

They went to service at a rustic little church in a remote Essex village.

The sun shone so brightly upon the glistening ivy that waved about the windows, and all seemed so happy and peaceful that Jessie took heart, and called herself very foolish for thinking such gloomy thoughts the night before.

After the service they strolled about the lanes between the budding hedges and looked across the clear, smokeless country; and Jessie was glad, feeling that Mac was every moment coming nearer and nearer, and that to-morrow she should see him.

After all, what was there in that letter to warrant so much alarm?

Later in the day, while Jessie was still in the remote Essex village,

Mac was being whirled through the lovelier Kentish country at express rate.

His original intention had been to see an eminent surgeon, who had been strongly recommended to him, and to know his opinion before seeing Jessie ; but finding himself in London at a comparatively early hour of the evening, he could not resist going in search of her, as soon as he had secured a room at a great hotel near the Ludgate Hill terminus, and had made himself presentable.

The church bells were ringing by that time for evening service ; but he thought if he took a cab and drove quickly through the empty streets, he might possibly find her still at home.

He had been feeling very sad all day long. The excitement of this last hurrying to meet Jessie cheered him up ; he could only think that in a few minutes he should see her, should hear her voice.

As he turned the angle at the end of Eastcheap and once more saw the historic Tower Street, with its narrow strip of blue and, on this Sunday, clear sky above its two rows of dingy houses, and the turrets of the White Tower filling all the space at the other end, as he drove along the thoroughfare that from time immemorial has led down to London's great fortress, he felt he was again to be with her, and all the fear of many days and nights flew away as he thought in how few minutes he was again to see her.

He sprang briskly from the cab as soon as it stopped at the well-remembered spot, paid the driver, and pulled vehemently at the bell.

The square was perfectly deserted ; as he waited impatiently at the door, it struck him that a creature with so much vitality as Jessie could not possibly be there : all seemed then so dead, in spite of the tender young verdure of the trees.

He was impatient ; he felt he was late, perhaps too late ; that if he were disappointed, he should hardly know how to bear it.

Presently half the heavy double-door was cautiously opened by Mrs. Robbins's third successor.

No one was at home. Mr. Bayliss had taken the young ladies into the country, Mrs. Bayliss had gone to church, Mr. Harbuckle had gone to some mission at the back of the Mint. Was he Mr. Carruthers ? Because Mr. Harbuckle had given orders that he was to be asked to stop, if he were.

"Thanks," said Mac ; "will he be late ?"

"Oh, no ; and the young ladies was to be in about eight."

"Then I'll come back ; I'll take a stroll and come back," said Mac, and turned away with a most horrible feeling of heart-sickness.

He had turned mechanically into Catherine Court before he knew well what he was doing.

He had nerved himself to seeing Jessie, with the full intention of telling her what was the matter ; but she had not been there to hear it.

There was no one to see him in Catherine Court ; he paced up and down for some time and a strange horror fell upon him.

Now Mac was naturally as brave a young fellow as ever breathed. Had he been the helmsman of a burning vessel, he would have stood at his post to the very last ; it was in him to do that sort of thing.

For the last six weeks or more the surgeon's knife had been constantly before his mind's eye ; he had accustomed himself to look at it without flinching ; but many and many a time when Jessie's face rose before him, between him and that keen blade, he had put his hands before his eyes, to hide the vision ; it brought with it a dread that made him tremble to his very heart's core.

After he had taken several turns along Catherine Court, he paused under the weather-worn iron-work at its entrance and gazed at Tower Hill and the great building below it.

"How many brave men have faced death here!" he thought. "It looks all so fair and calm now ; what sights it has witnessed ! Ah ! but it was not the death out here that was so terrible ; it was the parting down yonder !"

He had met with a book on board the mail steamer, in which was a touching account of the parting between Dr. Cameron, the last Jacobite executed in London, and his wife. It had greatly affected Mac at the time he read it. The scene recurred to his mind as he looked towards the Tower.

When the time had come for the wife to leave her husband for ever, she threw herself at his feet in an agony of tears. "Madam," said he, trying to raise her, "this is not what you promised me."

Those words had haunted Mac ever since he had read them. He knew, poor fellow, only too well, why.

And yet he seemed well and strong and weather-beaten. The black patch was gone from his forehead ; there was merely a slight discoloration near the eye at a little distance from where the patch had been.

He turned away from the Tower ; again went through Catherine Court, passed between the tall walls, heard the echo of his own foot-fall in the stillness, and strolled into Seething Lane.

St. Olave's was lighted up for service, the swell of the organ came across the churchyard. He went by it, remembering, however, that it was there, under that black Gate of the Dead, Jessie had seen her father.

He turned round into Hart Street, by the side of St. Olave's ; he walked slowly and sadly past the church door along the silent street between the deserted houses ; there was not a sound besides his own step.

Again there was the swell of the organ, and through the still air arose the clear chant of the full-voiced choir and the familiar response :

"The Lord's name be praised."

Mac heard every word distinctly. The words made him long, with a sudden rush of emotion, that his mother were not in her Indian grave, but with him in some quiet place where he might throw himself upon her breast and weep.

He turned; he could go no farther. He went back to John Harbuckle's house.

A scarlet coat was at the door, its wearer was gossiping with Mrs. Robbins's third successor. Mac simply remarked that he would go in and wait for Mr. Harbuckle.

He found his way unattended to that room which had grown to him so dear, the room that used to be John Harbuckle's den, and there he lay down wearily on the sofa.

The room seemed very desolate in the fast gathering twilight. He looked towards the window where he and Jessie had sat together, and then turned his face to the wall.

He would have to be brave when Jessie came back, he knew very well, but he felt weak enough then.

And yet, through all the weakness and horror, that chant, with its rich modulation, rose up continually: "The Lord's name be praised."

What did it mean? Was that the foreshadowing of their rejoicing when this calamity should be overpast (Mac had learned much Scripture from his Scotch aunt)? or was it to be like the words of Job: "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" Mean what it might, Mac heard it over and over again as he waited there, heard it rising and falling: "The Lord's name be praised."

It grew very nearly dark; no one had thought of lighting the lamps. Mac dropped off into a doze.

Presently he awoke with a start. There were voices on the stairs. He hurried to the door. He heard Jessie calling, oh, so gleefully:

"Mac! Mac! Where are you, Mac?"

He hurried down the stairs and caught her in his arms just as she passed the baize door.

It was too dark for them to see each other.

"Oh, Jessie, Jessie! What a time you've been!" cried Mac, kissing her many times over, in a tumult of delight. "How glad I am you've come at last!"

"This is good," cried Jessie. "I didn't expect you until tomorrow! I'm so glad you've come, Mac! But we mustn't block up the stairs like this. Let us go into the dining-room, and"—and they went on.

"What! no light! Let us ring for the lights, and then I'll be able to see you, Mac."

"Oh, wait awhile, please, Jessie," said Mac, half as in play, but with a certain something else under his tone. "Bide a wee, Jessie; let's have a little talk first before the lights come. How are you, darling? Sit down here and tell me."

"I'm as well as possible!" cried Jessie gaily. "And you?"

"Oh! I'm all right, except for a little lump near my left eye, that's all," said Mac.

"Mac," said Jessie gravely, "was that why you didn't wish for the light?"

"To tell you the truth it was, Jessie," said Mac, with an attempt at carelessness.

"Mac, dear," said Jessie, putting her hand on his quite calmly and firmly, but with infinite tenderness, as they sat side by side in the nearly dark room, "don't be afraid of frightening me. Tell me at once what is the matter. I am not going to be foolish. Tell me, Mac."

Mac drew a long breath.

"I haven't been to the doctor yet," he said, checking himself in time to prevent using the word *surgeon*. "As I haven't yet seen the doctor, I can't tell how it will turn out; but there's just a wee lump and a slight discolouration, that's all."

"That may mean a great deal," said Jessie gravely.

"Why, yes," said Mac, without any alteration in his voice; "it doesn't seem much, but it may mean—death!"

They sat in the darkness, hand in hand, for a moment or two, and Mac felt that Jessie was very near to him. Neither of them spoke, but Jessie could see that dreadful last word of Mac's written in great burning letters everywhere.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THEY TRY TO LOSE THEMSELVES.

IT was only for a few minutes that Mac and Jessie sat together in the deep twilight, silent, but feeling each other near; then the others came in, the lamp was lighted, Mac was hospitably welcomed, and not a word was said by any of them about the cause of his return.

He did not stay late; Jessie went down to the door with him; he promised her that she should know his fate as soon as he knew it himself.

The next day was very long to Jessie, although she filled it as full as possible with work, hardly daring to leave off for a moment.

Mac came again in the afternoon. He had seen the *surgeon*; he told Jessie the result of the interview in a very few sentences.

"He said, 'I must operate immediately.' I asked, 'How soon?' He replied, 'To-morrow.' I thought of the Muirhead people, and said they could hardly get to London by then. 'I'll give you until the following day, then.' So I agreed, and sent them a telegram; but I shall not put it off for them. He thinks I shall be all right again very soon. It's not going to make me ill, you know, Jessie; only I

wish it were to be to-morrow instead of the day after, but I thought the others would feel aggrieved if I did not give them due notice."

"Are they fond of you?" asked Jessie wistfully, looking into his face.

"I think they are," said Mac, in a tone that said he was sure they were.

Jessie felt that she was sorry for them, in spite of the persistency with which Mrs. Carruthers would not see the engagement.

"What are we going to do with ourselves all day to-morrow, Mac?" she asked gravely, but quite calmly.

"I can come here and talk to you," replied Mac, "or we can go out for a walk, or—perhaps I ought to know what the Muirhead people are going to do before we arrange anything. I daresay there is a telegram waiting for me at the hotel. I shouldn't wonder if my uncle doesn't come by to-night's mail; he never loses an opportunity of doing so if he can find even the shadow of an excuse. If he comes I shall have him on my hands at least all the forenoon. 'It is my duty and I will,' as Captain Reece, commander of the *Mantelpiece*, so finely puts it."

"Then it will be ever so late before you get here?"

"Oh, no, it won't be! I'll walk him round to his club as early as I can; you'll see I shall be here very soon after lunch; and then, if you will tolerate me for the rest of the day, why here I will stay, unless you like to take me out into the City and lose me. Ah, happy thought, let us go out and lose ourselves among those curious passages where your young men in the tea-trade run to and fro. By-the-by, Jessie, you have never pointed that young man you so earnestly wish me to resemble out to me. Let's go and look for him to-morrow! What do you say?"

"Very well," said Jessie, quite gaily, "only we must get out early or he'll be gone." And then they both began talking about all sorts of ridiculous things; yet when Alison presently came in, Jessie did not let her go away again, but made her sit next to her, quite close, and put her hand within her cousin's, and her hand was icy cold.

Events proved that Mac understood his uncle very well. The Laird came to town by the night mail; Mrs. Carruthers was to follow during the day; for, although a most affectionate couple, they rarely travelled to town together, the Laird objecting to wasting a day and his wife refusing to give up her night's rest.

"And Alec?" asked Mac of his uncle, after the first greetings were over.

"He'll go to the Dryfesdales for a week or so," replied Mrs. Carruthers. "I told him we should bring you back with us about the end of that time. The poor boy is needing you very much; so he says."

It was about midday when Mac succeeded in leaving his uncle at the club.

He at once went down to Trinity Square, after which he and the two girls—for in spite of the merry way in which both Mac and Jessie talked, they seemed strangely averse to being left alone—he and the two girls walked briskly up and down the business lanes and in and out of the fine new covered passages, all shining with glazed tiles, and tried very hard to lose themselves in the crowd around the Commercial Sale Rooms and various other places of resort. It was a warm bright afternoon, everyone looked very much alive, and the busy City was at its busiest. They could not help feeling how much alive and how busy it all was; but it was in vain they tried to lose themselves; they could not.

Among other audacities they actually went into Fenchurch Avenue, and, heedless of the "Arnold Birkett" on the door, invaded the offices of Jessie's father.

And Jessie's father sprang up at once from his letters, as if wonderfully delighted to see them, and the pleasant and recognisable light flew over his face as the three young people all burst out laughing at their own boldness in having, as Jessie said, "bearded the African lion in his den."

And Jessie's father, to mark the fortunate occurrence, produced a bottle of champagne from some private hiding-place (Heidsieck Dry Monopole it was), and asked them if they would not come upstairs and drink it.

They all thought it the finest fun in the world to go up the wide, airy staircase to Arthur Bayliss's well-lighted rooms.

"And," exclaimed Alison, as they entered, "now I know where so much of Uncle John's old furniture goes! Why what a treasure this large room must be to him! And a balcony too—of all delights in the world—a balcony!"

"The very thing I've been longing for all my life!" exclaimed Jessie, stepping out on to it and looking up and down the Avenue.

Then Arthur Bayliss went to that sideboard which he had purchased from the "rejuiced party" over the water, and found glasses, and they managed to finish that bottle of Heidsieck before Arthur Bayliss thought it was so nearly post time that he really must go and get his letters finished.

"And I say," said Mac to Jessie, as they left the exceedingly modern Fenchurch Avenue, "your father is a most uncommonly jolly person, and the City is a most uncommonly jolly place! By Jove, it is!"

So they managed to pass the afternoon. In the evening they did what was for them quite an unusual thing, they opened the piano and played and sang.

It was Mac who opened the instrument. "Oh, Jessie," he exclaimed, when they were all of them, including Arthur Bayliss and

Uncle John, in the drawing-room, "I've never played you my 'Banks and Braes' that Langdyke taught me."

And with the greatest *sang-froid* he sat down to the piano, which was new and stiff, and strummed through the air, thereby inciting Alison and Jessie to sing an endless number of Scotch songs.

"Brava, bravissima!" cried Mac, patting Jessie's hand when she at last left the piano and took her favourite place on the window-settle again. "Jessie, I never knew you could sing like that!"

"Didn't you? Ah, you don't know half my good qualities," laughed Jessie.

"I'm beginning to think I don't," replied Mac.

To tell the truth there had been a thrill in Jessie's voice as she sang that no one had ever heard there before. Alison, who was a most tender-hearted girl, and who loved Jessie very dearly, would have liked to have run away and have a good cry.

Mac did not stay late; he said he must go and look after his uncle, to whom he owed a sort of filial duty.

"Are you walking to Blackfriars?" asked John Harbuckle.

"I thought of doing so," returned Mac.

"It's a fine night," said Uncle John, "Jessie and I might as well go with you."

"Thanks; if Jessie is not tired," said Mac.

"Tired, oh, no," said Jessie. "I'll have my hat on in a minute."

So the three went to Blackfriars, John Harbuckle talking all the time in a calm undertone of the streets they passed along and of the people who, during the day, occupied the silent houses.

They paused an instant at the door of an hotel so foreign-looking that, if the moonlight had not shown the familiar Thames, they might well have fancied themselves in some continental town.

"Well, good-night to you," said John Harbuckle, shaking hands with Mac.

"Good-night, and many thanks," returned Mac. "Good-night, Jessie darling."

"Good-night, Mac dear."

A quiet kiss and Mac Carruthers was gone.

John Harbuckle, who had turned his head, espied a cab. He beckoned to the man, opened the door; Jessie got in, John Harbuckle following as soon as he had simply uttered the words "Trinity Square."

When they had driven a few yards Jessie put her hand within his and said, with a piteous little gasp and a shudder:

"Oh, Uncle John!"

He held her hand all the way back, but she never spoke another syllable, and he could say nothing.

CHAPTER XLIV.

AN INTERLUDE.

" MOST satisfactory ! "

" Doing as well as possible ! "

These were the reports John Harbuckle brought back when he went to inquire after Mac the next evening and the following day.

After that, notes to the same effect came in Mac's own hand.

It was an immense relief to all concerned. At Trinity Square they felt that they could again breathe more freely.

Jessie was quite certain she had never been so perfectly happy before in her life.

The reaction brought with it a buoyant hopefulness that was in itself an almost ecstatic delight.

Jessie was as sure now that Mac was going to get well again very soon as she had been certain he was going to die.

" I shall be able to drive round on Sunday," Mac wrote towards the end of the week ; " I will stay an hour, but no one must ask me to stay longer."

It was quite wonderful to Jessie that Mac should be able to come out again so soon ; but Mac was so young and strong, he could get over things so easily.

Now while the people in Trinity Square are awaiting Mac's recovery, I will, in order to pass the time profitably, and also to throw some light on an interesting subject, record a circumstance that took place in the drawing-room of John Harbuckle's house in the November of the preceding year—about the time that Mac Carruthers and Donaldson of Langdyke were cruising off Madeira.

You will remember that Jessie, when writing to Mac, had alluded to the frequent visits of a Major Merriman.

The young men on board the *Firefly* being—as young men at sea often are—hard up for something to do, had betted on the affair, even so long ago as when the *Firefly* was off Stockholm.

" He bets she will ; I, she won't," wrote Mac.

The visits of the Major had been interrupted by Mrs. Bayliss's visit to her " place in Scotland ; " for by this term, which allows the hearer's imagination such ample space to work in, she now always spoke of Cauldknowe.

The Major was her very first visitor on her return.

Here is a little scene which occurred not long afterwards—within, to be quite accurate, eleven days of her leaving Birrendale and the grave beside the wild stream that was still rushing down to the Solway.

She had wept very bitterly as she crossed the level plains by the

Firth's side ; there had been no Alison to cheer her, to point out the fair light on the English border.

But south of Carlisle, she had smiled a smile full of meaning. The question now to be considered is : What was that meaning ?

If you would know, consider this little scene.

It was late in the afternoon. John Harbuckle's Wedgwood tray was still on the slender-legged table ; empty tea-cups stood here and there about the room on various pieces of furniture. Mrs. Bayliss, Major Merriman, and the girls were also scattered here and there ; Mary, still in her widow's cap, occupying a low chair by the fire (for the day was cold), the Major a corner of the sofa close to her ; Alison was nearly opposite them, at the table in the centre of the room, Jessie between them at one of the windows.

The Major had arrived at four o'clock, it was nearly six now ; but still he lingered.

Mary and the girls had each done quite a long piece of knitting since he had been there.

Presently it struck the hour. The girls rose ; it was time to think of dressing for dinner. They slipped away.

The Major rose, opened the door for them, and returned, but not to the sofa.

He took up a position on the hearth-rug, and observed, accompanying his words with several of those little shrugs and arranging of garments by which a man indicates that he is about to depart :

“Ahem ! It is time for me to be going !”

When he had made this remark, commonplace enough, there fell a dead silence on them both. There was a very long pause, during which the Major screwed the top button of his coat as far round as it would go without coming off. When he had screwed one way, he screwed it the other.

“Ah—it is time for me to be going !” he repeated ; but he lingered still.

“Are you obliged to hurry away ?” asked Mrs. Bayliss calmly, very calmly, and without looking up from her knitting.

“Why, yes,” said the Major nervously.

They had been talking about poor Emma and poor Bayliss, they had been showing each other portraits ; the time had not seemed long to—yes, I think I must say it—to either of them.

The Major's fingers clutched at the jet guard to which was attached the locket containing his late wife's hair and likeness. He sighed deeply.

“I must go.” Then he stopped a moment or two. “But when I leave here there is always such a blank,” he said with simple pathos.

He looked down at Mrs. Bayliss, she seemed to him a fair sympathetic creature.

“An awful blank,” he repeated.

Again there was a dead silence.

"You know what I mean, you have felt the same," he said after a very speaking pause.

"I do still," murmured the widow.

"An awful blank," reiterated the widower. "Could you not fill it?" Another pause, longer, more impressive.

"That is impossible," said Mary Bayliss gravely, still looking down at her knitting.

"Of course the past is passed, in—in a sense," said the Major: "but still—yes—I am sure you *could* fill it, if—if you would be—if you could bring your mind to accept such a task."

Mary Bayliss laid her knitting down on her lap, she crossed the hand on which was her wedding-ring over the right wrist, and she looked up steadily to Major Merriman.

"I thank you most sincerely for the honour you do me," she said, with deep gravity. "If it were possible for me to accept your offer I would do so, but"—and her face suddenly became irradiated as if by some inner light, and for the moment she seemed transfigured, young and beautiful once more—"but"—touching the white crape that covered her pale hair, and speaking with indescribably clear tones full of buoyant pride and tender sorrow—"I would not exchange my widow's cap for all the coronets in England, nor my loneliness for the devotion of the best man now living in all the world."

Her upward glance, her firm tones all but paralysed the little Major; he felt rooted to the spot; he gazed at her as if mesmerised, with his childlike eyes wide open.

Then the colour flew into his face, he bent his head, he looked down at the rug; Mary gazed at her wedding-ring; again there was a dead silence.

Then, after a minute or two, the widower quietly advanced a step, took the widow's hand, raised it to his lips as if it had been the Queen's, and withdrew, gently closing the door behind him.

Mary sat still for another minute smiling at the ring; then she rose suddenly, and ran upstairs to her own room with a lightness of foot that had not been hers for many a year.

She burst into tears as soon as she had turned the key; they were the happiest tears she had shed since her long-past girlhood; since, in fact, the day James Bayliss asked her to be his wife in the woods that overlook Woolwich Common.

She had made a great sacrifice to the memory of her James; how proud, how thankful she was that she had spoken that decisive sentence no pen can tell!

"James!" she exclaimed, almost as if he were really there, "I said it, James!" and she repeated that sentence word for word in a tumult of happy and sorrowful feelings.

And she *had* made a very great sacrifice; from her own point of view, the greatest sacrifice she could have made. With what pride did she now offer that sacrifice to him! She went over each item as

if each item were in itself a costly gift ; there was the little Major himself, her husband's old comrade, whom she could have found it in her heart to like very much ; there was the house on Woolwich Common ; the return to the dearly-beloved military life ; there was the freedom from the City she detested ; the showing Mrs. Carruthers of Muirhead that she was still an attractive woman ; there were all these things, and they all had their weight, especially the Major's own startled eyes and unspoiled face and character ; these items, I repeat, were all things she valued highly and knew she valued, but she took them all, every one of them, and threw them at the feet of her James Bayliss in a passion of delight and grief.

When her emotions had somewhat subsided, she went up to her brother's den and, unannounced, walked in triumphantly, but withal with a certain quiet dignity.

John Harbuckle was looking over a manuscript in Alison's handwriting.

"Well, Mary!" he exclaimed, turning round quickly at something quite unusual in the way his sister touched his shoulder ; "my dearest girl, what has happened ?—has he proposed ?"

"He has," said Mary emphatically ; "but I couldn't do it ; no, I couldn't do it ! Ah, John !" and she smiled and shook her head, "how different, how very different a widower is from a widow !"

"Some widowers"—put in John Harbuckle significantly—

"I'm going to stay with you, John."

"That's right !" exclaimed her brother. "That's right ! After all said and done, Mary, you're a true Harbuckle ; a real, true, genuine Harbuckle," and he looked with admiration at her still bright face ; "and a very good example, too, my dear !—a very good example !"

"Thank you !" laughed Mary ; then her mood suddenly altering : "John," she said, laying her hand firmly on his shoulder, "I would not change my widow's cap for all the coronets in Europe !"

The brother and sister understood each other very much better after this.

"But," asks someone, "didn't she encourage the poor little Major, don't you think ?—just a little, now ?"

Ah ! my friend, there are depths, there are depths ! Leave them alone ; all I can tell you is that Mary Bayliss refused him and was a happier woman ever after.

What I personally regret the most in the affair is that Mary's devotion was not offered at a worthier shrine ; for, to tell the truth, the late Captain James Bayliss was not much except as a husband.

"A failure ! a failure, Mary ; all my life I've been a failure !" had been the poor fellow's dying lament. "Never—never once in your love to me !" had been Mary's passionate response.

But had she flirted with the Major ?—Ah !

(To be concluded.)

“LIBERTÉ, ÉGALITÉ, FRATERNITÉ.”

BY C. J. LANGSTON.

A STAR fell from Heaven, and all was darkness. It was the bright star of justice, truth, and liberty; and France, fair France, mistook intervallal gloom for light.

All civilised Europe turns away its face—“mute, motionless, aghast;” for there in the foreground stands a solitary figure with eyes strained over the sea, feet clogged with heavy fetters, guarded day and night, condemned to eternal silence, yet bearing on his fevered brow the bright impress of INNOCENCE; whilst near at hand, ghoul-like with knitted brow and gnashing teeth, and uplifted sword stands France; and on her forehead by the lurid light of infamy I read GUILT. The victim is ALFRED DREYFUS, whose only crime is that he is a Jew.

“He will surely die,” said his fiendish tormentors. But he did not die. Almost stifled with the hot air of his narrow cell; with brain reeling from the consciousness of innocence; with feet lacerated with cruel fetters; without interchange of speech or thought, this brave soldier still believed in the help of GOD: and just when relapsing into imbecility, there came a ray of hope through the prison bars, and the day of deliverance dawned. And now a man prematurely old and broken leaves the heinous captivity of five years on Devil’s Island pardoned for a crime never committed, and all Paris shouts “*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité!*”

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” So runs the American Declaration of Independence, whilst enslaving thousands of her subjects until thirty years ago. France for three hundred years has been sowing the wind, now she reaps the whirlwind. Her population is at a standstill; the flower of her army is in the hands of the Jesuits, her government a by-word and a proverb of reproach; she waits but the coming of a man strong enough to place the nation under his foot, and then the Republic will be in ruins.

“Shame falls full upon the Christless form
Whose brand-mark signs the holy hounds of Rome.”

This is the harvest; what has been the seed-sowing?

Three hundred and thirty years ago there was another soldier betrayed and sacrificed by France on the altar of Fanaticism. Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, like Captain Dreyfus, was the bravest of the

brave. A giant in battle, a gentle-souled Christian in peace. But what were all his victories compared with the fact that he had placed himself at the head of the hated Huguenots? Summoned to Court, Charles IX. received him graciously, and professed great regard for him. That Machiavellian monarch, like Judas of old, said, "All hail when most he meant all harm." At his instigation the Admiral was wounded by a musket ball shot from a window; yet the victim, like Alfred Dreyfus, could not realise such treachery. Two nights afterwards came the terrible massacre of St. Bartholomew when the drums beat to arms; thousands of defenceless Protestants were slaughtered in cold blood, and—

"The streets ran so red with the blood of the dead
That they blushed like the waves of hell."

Admiral Coligny, the Wellington of his time, the most loyal subject king ever had, was stealthily slain in his sitting-room, his head cut off and sent to Catherine de Medici, and his body hung by the feet on a gibbet. The King shot at the fugitives as they hurriedly passed the palace windows, and his patron, the Pope of Rome, applauded; ordered a service of thanksgiving to be printed (a copy of which is preserved in the Bodleian) and had a medal struck with the heroic representation of a Papist soldier piercing an unarmed Protestant in the back. So much for "*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*," as interpreted in France in 1572. When that iniquitous bigot, Philip II., heard of this fanatical atrocity, he laughed for the first time in his life.

Again the seed-sowing—again the harvest. In 1684 that crafty fiend, Louis XIV., who pensioned Charles II., being stricken with remorse for his debaucheries, was incited by the priesthood to make atonement by again offering on the altar of Fanaticism the hapless Huguenots, whose only crime, like that of Dreyfus, was their innocence and their patriotism. Although steeped to the lips in crime, the King hesitated to do what Charles IX. had done with the especial favour of infallibility a hundred years before. He reluctantly stopped short of murder, but he ordered 50,000 Protestants, the bone and sinew of the country, suddenly and ignominiously to quit France, and thereby to enrich England, their descendants being amongst the most thriving and respected families in our midst. This was Louis the Fourteenth's idea of "*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*" in 1684.

The tide of time rushed along for another hundred years. The human puppets in France had been taken to pieces and packed in oblong boxes, and again with the seed-sowing of vitriolic persecution of the innocent came the harvest. Among the most striking instances of such persecution even to death was that of the Protestant Jean Calas, broken on the wheel in 1761, on the utterly false and malignant charge that he had slain his son (who committed suicide) to prevent his conversion to Romanism. The mayor of the town came to gloat over his torments and to urge him to confess, to whom Calas replied,

“Alas! where there is no crime, how can there be accomplices?” In vain Voltaire and others pleaded piteously for his life, and these the brave Picquarts of that day never rested until years afterwards the innocence of Calas was fully established, and restitution to the bereaved family grudgingly made. Thus history repeats itself.

But, there is a Nemesis for nations as well as for individuals, and such seed-sowing brought a terrible harvest. The destroying angel, with flaming sword which turned every way, appeared in the heavens. A generation passed, and then came the awful Revolution of 1789-1795. It came on the wings of night, black as Erebus, destructive as an avalanche, resistless as the deluge:—

“As when some mighty painter dips
His pencil in the gloom of earthquake and eclipse.”

What bell was that which first summoned the long-suffering people, pale, lean, and leaden-eyed, to revolt in 1789? It was the self-same bell which 217 years before gave the loud signal for the massacre of St. Bartholomew; when at the instigation of Pope and priest, thousands of innocent men had been suddenly murdered in this fair land of *“Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité.”* Now it was the turn of the priesthood. They were mown down in sheaves during this overripe harvest. The Jesuits had brought religion itself into such disrepute that men abhorred its very name. They set up a harlot in the holy place, and worshipped her as the goddess of Reason; and, as one man in his time plays many parts, that chameleon, Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord, ex-Bishop of Autun, alternately Royalist, Constitutional and Socialist, skipped about, posing as High Priest on that occasion.

But the tragedy deepened daily, with Robespierre, a second merciless Judge Jeffries, at its head. The people had tasted blood, and their thirst increased; and small wonder, for they had been ground under the heel of exorbitant taxation. Taxes for the King, taxes for the Government, taxes for the landowners, taxes for the priests. Such was the impost-smitten land of liberty. These people were starving, whilst the despotic aristocracy revelled in riot and plenty. Said one official, in answer to their piteous cry for bread, “Let the plebs eat grass.” That was remembered in that awful retribution. Thrice they slung him up to the lamp-post; thrice he fell stunned and bleeding: being at length choked with a wisp of grass thrust down his throat. The innocent King and Queen, reviled, imprisoned, beheaded; Louis having an unseemly tussle with the executioner about his undervest.

Chiefly came the aristocracy. The guilty and the innocent in that red rain were carted in shoals to the guillotine: some, like Madame Roland, with an heroic exclamation on her lips when passing the statue of Liberty: “O Liberty, what crimes are committed in thy name!” some timorous like the beardless boy who happened to be born a few inches higher than his fellows. Gazing into the sunny

sky, "Oh, it is so hard to die!" "Why fear?" said his companion, a poor sempstress, equally innocent. "I will die first, and show you how easy it is."

Ladies of gentle birth, and fortitude begotten of constant horror, waved a cheerful adieu to their sisters in prison: "My friends, you must find other actors to-night for our comedy." Was there any patriotic Scheurer-Kestner to protest against crime, or any comrade satiated with innocent blood, off with his head. Each trial was a travesty of justice, as in the case of Dreyfus; the judges wore the Phrygian cap of Liberty: there was no fear of an avenging Charlotte Corday: all was equality and fraternity in this brotherhood of iniquity, until the fires of hell sunk low and the national nightmare, the great French Revolution, had burned itself out.

France had been chastised with whips, now she was to be chastised with scorpions. Behold the man and the hour! A little man in large cockade, bearing the tricolour of "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité," came from Corsica to enslave the nation, and to blind its eyes with the brittle dust of glory. Without one spark of honour or feeling, he could witness with a ferocious laugh the head of a newly married soldier by his side cut off by a cannon ball; he could betray and murder his hostage the amiable Duc d'Enghien, after a mock military trial, worthy of that at Rennes; he could murder hundreds of prisoners in cold blood, and leave thousands of his brave army to perish at Moscow, and pension the would-be assassin of the Duke of Wellington. Deeming himself invincible, the shaft of God's lightning struck him, and he fell like Lucifer from the heaven of his ambition, never to rise again. He broke his parole at Elba, honour he had none to forfeit, and then the great Napoleon, small in adversity, died of disease at St. Helena, eating his heart out; and in return for having decapitated the flower of the army, and placed the nation under the heel of foreign foes, France gratefully enrolled him among the war gods.

Thirty years pass, another Napoleon arises with the like "vaulting ambition which doth o'erleap its saddle." He wades through slaughter to a throne in 1851, instigates a riot in Paris that he may slay twelve hundred victims, and proclaim himself the harbinger of peace and good will. History repeats itself, especially in France. On December 8th, 26,642 persons were either transported to Algeria and Cayenne, or brought before a tribunal, half military, half civil, and condemned, like the martyr of Devil's Island, on *ex parte* evidence.

But Nemesis again lies in wait. Twenty years of feverish prosperity, twenty years of gilded dissipation, and the lofty eagle is stricken by a bolt from the blue. The Emperor, pain-stricken, enfeebled, apprehensive, is forced into war with Prussia by his fascinating wife. "This is my war," exultingly exclaimed the Empress, "to maintain the temporal power of the Pope," the most

rotten state in Europe, where every third man was a priest, a spy, or a soldier. France entered into the contest with a light heart. The Emperor as head of the army, with a brilliant staff, flashes by, like a gleam of ruby light, to the front. The Prince Imperial follows, and, after a slight skirmish, the delighted father writes home: "Rejoice! Our little Louis has received his baptism of fire."

A few months afterwards what a reversal! I saw the meeting between husband, wife, and child at Dover, exiled, dethroned, crushed: the father dying from disease shortly afterwards, the only son killed in a skirmish with remote savages, the desolate mother "distilling bitter, bitter drops from sweets of former years." *Vanitas vanitatum.*

Meanwhile, the Pope, whose cause she advocated, presuming on victory, spake great swelling words, and, amid the thunder of cannon, announced his own infallibility at the very moment when the first shot was fired between the armies of France and Germany, and which foretold the downfall of his dynasty, and caricatured his impious assumption of the attributes of GOD.

Nearly thirty years have passed, and the French nation still babbles about "*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*," whilst its vicious instincts find vent in bull-fights instead of the long-cherished *auto-da-fé*, and yet, prompted by the Jesuits, the innocent Jew is still the object of their unceasing hatred.

In January, 1898, says a writer in the *Fortnightly Review*, "a veritable St. Bartholomew's massacre took place of the poorer Jews of Algiers. Their houses and their synagogues were looted and set on fire, Spanish viragos with whips seized Jewish female children and scourged them naked through the streets, sick Jews were cast helpless out of the hospitals, women were dragged by the hair through the city, their husbands were clubbed to death before their eyes, and their children refused admission by the popularly-elected mayors to the public schools."

The time for the great exhibition in Paris approaches; can it eclipse the greater exhibition of fanatical barbarism which has shocked the whole civilised world? The gay Parisian, like the sundial, counts only the sunny hours. Therefore hang out the banners, let them bear the precious motto, mocking past and present history: "*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité!*"

And what of this latest iniquity?

A WONDERFUL AND HORRIBLE THING IS COMMITTED IN THE LAND;
THE PROPHETS PROPHESY FALSELY, AND THE PRIESTS BEAR RULE
BY THEIR MEANS; AND MY PEOPLE LOVE TO HAVE IT SO: AND
WHAT WILL YE DO IN THE END THEREOF?

BLUEBEARD'S CHAMBER.

"AND you are happy, Nancy?"

"Of course I am," replied Nancy with a slight accent of defiance in her voice. Her cousin, Charlotte Fenton, noted it and laughed.

"And if you were not you would not tell me," she said lightly, as she pinched the fair soft cheek that was nearest to her.

"But I am quite perfectly happy; I am indeed," protested Nancy, while the wild rose-bloom deepened in her pretty face, "and I don't think you have any right to say such things, Chatty."

Charlotte laughed again.

"Methinks the lady doth protest too much," she quoted mischievously. "My dear child, you need not get so hot about it; one might think you wanted to convince yourself as well as me, and I did not say anything. I only asked a simple question."

Nancy winked the tears of annoyance out of her eyes and hoped Chatty had not seen them.

It had been just the same when she had been seven and Charlotte ten; the elder cousin had always been able to provoke the younger to tears and hasty words, and then had laughed at her for being so easily roused. They had not met for a year, and Nancy had fondly hoped that, now she was a married woman and Charlotte was not, their relative positions would be changed, but she was quickly finding out that they were to be precisely the same.

"And you have been married a whole year," went on Charlotte, her keen eyes taking in every detail of the dainty little figure beside her; "you don't look any different. You are just the same little foolish Nancy. And you do not mind his being so old?"

"John isn't old," flashed out Nancy; "he is only——"

"He is forty-eight, and you are twenty-three," said Charlotte, in her quietly aggravating voice. "He might be your father."

"I don't care," said Nancy, "I like a man. I would not have married a silly boy. And John is only forty-seven."

"Everyone to her taste," said Charlotte. "For my part I should like someone more my own age. I have no fancy for spending my life with my grandfather. May I have another cup of tea, Nan?"

Nancy took the cup without speaking, and bit her lip as she poured out the tea. She had been glad to see Chatty, but now she wished she had not come.

"You had a nice long honeymoon," remarked Charlotte, as she took the cup and carefully added sugar and cream. "No more cake, thank you. Were you away a whole year?"

"All but three weeks," said Nancy brightly; "we had the most lovely time."

"You must have had plenty of time for talking to each other. I suppose you told John all your secrets?"

"I don't think I have many secrets," laughed Nancy, whose sunny temper soon recovered from any vexation, "but of course I tell him everything."

"And he returns the compliment? I suppose by this time he has told you the history and mystery of his past life. Was it interesting?"

"We did not spend our time discussing our past lives," said Nancy; "there was too much to do and to see in the present. John used to talk about his mother sometimes and his younger sister who died, but—"

"But he did not want you to know all about his past," suggested Charlotte.

"Chatty!" cried Nancy, flushing hotly from brow to pretty round chin, "you shall not say such things to me. There was nothing to conceal, nothing I might not know. We had plenty to talk about. We were seeing lovely things every day and we read a great many books."

"What an ideal existence!" sneered Charlotte, who was no more affected by Nancy's anger than she would have been if a small kitten had put up its back at her.

"It was a very happy life," said Nancy quietly.

"And now you are going to settle down. When do you go to the Burnetts?"

"At the end of next month, I hope. We took these rooms for two months. John goes down nearly every day, and he says the workmen are getting on quickly now."

"Is it a pretty place?"

"Yes, I think so. It is not very big, you know, and it is old-fashioned, but John says he is sure I shall like it, it is so quaint and comfortable."

"Haven't you seen it yet?"

"No, John doesn't want me to until it is finished."

Charlotte did not speak, but she looked steadily at Nancy in a way that made her ask irritably—

"What is the matter, Chatty?"

"Nothing. Only it seems so strange he does not want you to see the house until he has had ever so much done to it."

"There is nothing strange in that. It has not been lived in for a long time—not since Mrs. Wedderburn died, and it was very much out of repair. John is having it thoroughly painted and done up, and of course he does not want me to see it for the first time all in confusion, and with workmen and ladders everywhere. I have been with him to choose the new carpets and furniture that are needed. What are you laughing at, Chatty?"

"I did not know I was laughing. I was only thinking what a little innocent you are. You believe everything you are told. You may be sure he has some reason for keeping you up here and going down constantly himself."

"Of course he has a reason," said Nancy; "I have told you what it is."

"Do you call that a reason fit to give to anyone except a baby? Perhaps he has been married before and is removing all his first wife's things."

"Chatty, how can you be so silly? Of course I should know if he had been married before—everybody would know. People do not keep such things secret."

"Not unless they have a reason for so doing. Perhaps he married quite a common person and was ashamed of her, and she lived at the Burnetts after his mother died. It is so strange he did not marry until he was forty-six. Did he ever tell you why he didn't?"

"Yes," said Nancy with a pretty dimpling smile, "he did tell me that. He said it was because—he had never met me."

"What a pretty speech!" mocked Charlotte. "Did he live at the Burnetts before he was married?"

"His mother lived there until she died five years ago, and he used to spend a good deal of time there with her."

"Why does he go down every day? Do the workmen require constant supervision?"

"No; he goes there to paint. He had a studio built on to the house before we went away, and he is very busy with a large picture. He has no studio in London now."

Charlotte finished her tea and put down the cup.

"Where did he live before he was married when he was not at the Burnetts?" she asked as she began to put on her gloves.

"Latterly in London. He had rooms here and a studio. He found it so lonely at the Burnetts. Before that he lived abroad a great deal, studying art, first in Paris and then in Italy."

"Then it is no wonder he did not care to talk to you about his past life," said Charlotte. "Art students in Paris do awfully wild, queer things. Oh, you need not get so angry, you little chicken! I know he is a pattern of all the virtues now; but, trust me, he had a gay time when he was young."

As a matter of fact Charlotte knew about as much, or as little, of the ways of art students, or indeed of any other class of men, as Nancy did. She had read *Trilby* and one or two other novels which dealt with the subject, but of actual knowledge she had none. Nor did she really think that John Wedderburn had any doubtful past to conceal; she only desired the pleasure of teasing Nancy. Nancy—who had been everybody's pet as a child, of whom she had always been jealous—Nancy had made a good marriage, and she was not even engaged. Therefore, as she could not prevent Nancy

from having what she would have greatly liked to possess herself, it only remained for her to destroy some of Nancy's innocent pleasure in her good fortune. She did not desire to make her seriously unhappy, but she did wish to remove a little of the very abundant gilt from her glittering gingerbread.

When she at last took her departure Nancy leant back in her chair with an unwonted sense of fatigue and discomfort such as she had not felt since her marriage. She did not for a moment believe any of Charlotte's unpleasant suggestions about her husband, but she was left with a vague feeling of soreness, as though something painful had happened or was about to happen to her.

She was roused at last by a familiar step on the stairs and a short cheery whistle, and, springing up, she flew to the door, while every shadow vanished in an instant.

"John," she cried gladly, "is it really you? I did not hear the door. I was so afraid you would not come until the eight-twenty-five!"

"So was I; but I thought of a lonely little woman waiting for her dinner and hurried on," said a deep kindly voice, and a tall man caught Nancy's little figure in his arms and kissed her.

John Wedderburn was an artist and a successful one, but there was nothing of the Bohemian about him. He was a handsome man, tall and well made, but slender, with a good face, honest brown eyes that looked straight into the eyes of the world, wavy hair as yet untouched by grey, an auburn moustache and short pointed beard. He was neat and trim in his dress, and had beautiful long-fingered artistic hands.

As they stood side by side, despite the difference in their years, he looked no unfit mate for dainty little Nancy. His great love for her shone in his kindly eyes and beaming smile, and if in Nancy's love for him there was mingled a little filial reverence with wisely devotion, it was a true deep love that filled all her young life with gladness and content.

"Come and sit down, John," she said, drawing him towards his own particular easy-chair, "and I will ring for fresh tea. I should like another cup myself, for I had mine very early. Chatty Fenton called, and it was brought up for her."

John Wedderburn sank into the depths of his chair and watched with happy eyes the pretty picture his young wife made as she flitted about the tea-table, re-arranging everything, and ordering fresh tea and more hot cakes to be brought as quickly as possible. She chattered cheerily while her husband was having his tea; but when he had finished she drew a low stool to his side and sat silent, resting her head wearily against his knee.

"Tired, sweetheart?" he asked presently as he stroked her bright hair.

"I don't know," said Nancy, rousing herself and looking up at him

with a smile. "I have not done anything to tire myself, but I suppose I am. I think it must be Chatty."

"What did Chatty do?"

"She came to see me, and stayed a long time, and"—with a nervous little laugh—"I think she vexed me."

John Wedderburn put his hand under Nancy's chin and turned her face up so that he could look into her eyes.

"Why, you are crying, Nan," he said with some concern, for in his experience Nancy's tears had not been at all frequent. "What did she say to you, darling?"

"Oh, it was nothing really!" said Nancy, rubbing her hand quickly over her eyes and trying to smile. "I know I am very silly, but Chatty could always tease me when we were children, and I suppose we have neither of us grown as much better and wiser as we might have done. She knows exactly how to aggravate me; and, when she goes, I feel as if my mind had been beaten with sticks."

"Poor little Nancy! She sha'n't come here if she vexes you, and you can tell her so."

Nancy laughed and sat quietly for a minute or two, pulling the signet ring on and off his little finger. Then she said suddenly—

"When shall we go down to the Burnetts, John?"

"When? Oh, in a few weeks! Are you tired of being here?"

"No," said Nancy, slipping the ring on to her own small thumb and regarding it critically; "but of course I want to see it. Is it not nearly finished?"

"They are getting on, but there is a great deal to do yet."

"I want to go," said Nancy. "These rooms are nice enough, but it is rather dull having lunch always by myself; and you hardly ever come home as early as this. I wish you had kept on the London studio. Why do you have to stay so late, John? It is not light enough to paint after five o'clock, and you generally stay until seven."

"It is because the trains are so awkward," said John. "You see, Nancy, when I come by the four-fifteen, as I did to-day, I have to stop working at four, and so I lose an hour of daylight; but, if I take that hour, there is no other train until seven twenty-five. So, in that case, I have an hour in which I am only wishing I was having tea with you."

"Well, I do wish there was a train at a quarter past five."

"So do I; but I will tell you what I have been thinking. If I work hard until the end of next month, I could take two or three weeks' holiday, and we would go to the seaside or anywhere you like, and by the end of that time I hope the house will be quite ready. Would you like that, Nannie?"

"I would rather go to the Burnetts," said Nancy, with a spice of

obstinacy in her voice. "Couldn't they get one or two rooms done?" contended Nancy. "You go down nearly every day and have lunch there. How do you manage?"

John hesitated for an almost imperceptible instant, but Nancy's ears were quick to remark it.

"There is the room I paint in," he said, "but it has no furniture yet, except my easel and things and one chair. Andrews, my mother's old housekeeper, does me a chop and brings it in on a tray, which generally has to stand on an old box, and if I stay late she gets me a cup of tea. It would not be comfortable for you, dear, even for a day."

Nancy said no more, but whenever a visit to the seaside was mentioned she made some objection, until at last it was decided that the house should be got into sufficient order for them to go into it at the beginning of June.

They left London the first week in June and went to the Burnetts, a picturesque little place, which had been the home of the Wedderburns for five or six generations, and which was only about an hour's journey from town. They arrived in time for afternoon tea, and Nancy went into ecstasies over everything; the quaint gabled house covered with creepers, the pretty old-world garden, with its velvet lawns and wealth of roses, and the beautiful old china and silver on the daintily laid tea-table which had been put under a large cedar tree opposite the French windows of the drawing-room.

"It is lovely, it is exquisite," she cried, as she actually danced on the lawn for very gladness of heart. "Just look at those dear sweet cups and saucers, and that beautiful old china bowl full of roses. I never, never saw such a pretty tea-table, or such a charming house and garden. Oh, John, it would have been a cruel shame to go away anywhere just now, when all the roses are out."

"And all the strawberries ripe," said John, smiling at her pleasure, and popping a luscious berry into her mouth. "There, that is the first of your very own strawberries, Mrs. Wedderburn. I am glad you like it all so much, sweetheart, and now, if you will give me some tea, I will show you all over the house and round the garden."

That was the happiest summer Nancy had ever spent. The summer they had travelled had been full of interest and delight, but this one was even happier. She was charmed with her country home, she was never tired of hearing stories about "Master John's" childhood and youth, which Andrews, the old cook and housekeeper, was equally delighted to tell. John laughed at these stories and declared that Andrews invented most of them, but as they all redounded to his credit Nancy believed every word.

"What room is that, Andrews?" she asked, one morning when Andrews had proudly displayed the contents of one of "the old mistress's" linen presses, which Nancy had not previously explored. She laid her hand on the handle of the door as she spoke, and found

that it was locked. The old oak linen press stood on the wide sunny landing place just by the locked door, and Andrews was busily restoring its snowy lavender-scented contents to their places in the deep drawers and on the wide shelves.

"Ten—eleven—twelve," she said, counting a pile of pillow-cases that were neither frilled nor embroidered, but owed their beauty to their texture, which was fine as cambric. "That, ma'am? Oh, that is one of master's rooms. He always locks it and keeps the key."

"Why?" asked Nancy. She had noticed that John had passed that door when he had shown her the house and had fancied it might be only a cupboard. She had meant to inquire about it later, but had found so many things to see and admire that she had forgotten it.

Andrews stooped to pick up a pile of table-cloths.

"Because he doesn't want anybody to meddle with his things, I suppose, ma'am," she said.

"What things?" asked Nancy again. She would not have questioned any of the other servants, but Andrews was not an ordinary servant and knew all that was to be known about "the family" and its doings.

"His painting things, ma'am, he never likes them to be touched. Just look at that stitching. Did you ever see any so fine?"

"But he paints in the studio," objected Nancy, after she had looked without much interest at the stitching.

Andrews was counting towels, with her back turned to her mistress, so she failed to see the little frown that puckered her brow.

"He paints up here sometimes, ma'am," she answered, in her comfortable good-tempered voice. "I am sure I can't tell you why. I never asked him. You know gentlemen will have their little ways, as we women can't always see the reason for, and there's nothing for it but to let them alone, when it is a thing as doesn't matter much. So when master locked that door and said that nobody wasn't to go in, 'How can they, sir?' said I, 'if you keep the key. Only, I should like to know, sir, when and how it is to be cleaned?' And he laughed and said when he wanted it to be cleaned he would let me know. Once he lost the key and was in ever such a taking about it.

"Where did he find it?" asked Nancy, who was sitting in the broad cushioned window-seat, the sun shining on her through the painted glass and making a gorgeous nimbus round her fair head.

"He never found it at all," replied Andrews. "He had to have another key made, and where that first key went to is an 'unsolved mystery,' as my old Aunt Lydia used to say when they asked her why she never got married. That is all the linen, ma'am, and another morning if you are at liberty I should like to show you all the old china. There is a cupboardful downstairs, and some of it is beautiful." And Andrews locked the press and went ponderously

down the back stairs, while Nancy danced lightly down the front ones.

"John," she said that afternoon when he came out on to the lawn for his cup of tea, "what is that room next to the blue room, and why is it locked? I want to go into it."

John looked at her with a smile in his eyes.

"That," he said solemnly, "is Bluebeard's chamber, my dear."

"But what is it really, John?"

"It is a room I use sometimes."

"To paint in?"

"Perhaps."

"But why do you paint up there instead of in the studio?" asked Nancy, concluding that "perhaps" meant "yes."

"Circumstances alter cases," replied John oracularly. "A little more cream, please, Nan."

Nancy came to his side with the cream jug.

"Let me go into it," she said coaxingly, laying her cheek against the top of his head.

"Oh, Fatima, are you such a daughter of Eve as that?" inquired John, as she added cream to his tea. "Have you an immediate craving for forbidden fruit?"

"I did not know it was forbidden. I asked if I might go in, and you did not answer."

"Did not the locked door imply as much?"

"But not for me, John," she said, laying a pleading hand on his arm. "You will let me go in."

He took the little hand in his and smiled at the winsome face. "No, my Nancy, I would rather you did not go into it—yet."

"But I want to go in now, John."

"And I want you to wait, darling. Do that much to please me, Nannie. Trust me and have patience. You must give me time to dispose of my former wives' heads, you know. Or was it their bodies?"

It was an unfortunate jest with the memory of Charlotte's words still in Nancy's mind, and though she laughed and said no more, she was neither pleased nor satisfied. Her nature, however, was too sweet and healthy, her love for her husband too great, to allow her to brood over the thought of the shut-up room and to make a grievance of it. The summer days were perfect in their beauty, she had everything to make her happy, and she would not poison her happiness by dwelling on this one restriction; so, although the sight of the locked door was generally a small trial to her patience, she honestly tried to forget it and would probably have conquered her desire to open it if Charlotte Fenton had not invited herself for a week's visit to the Burnetts.

Nancy was glad to see her, for in spite of their differences the cousins were really fond of each other, and she was proud to act as

hostess and show her handsome attentive husband and charming house to her cousin, but Charlotte had not been with her twenty-four hours before the old vexation began. She was delighted with the place, and when Nancy showed her over it, praised everything as warmly as the heart of any young house-wife could desire.

"It is simply perfect," she said, as they came down after admiring the view from the top landing window; "I never imagined it was so pretty. What a lovely old oak press."

"Isn't it?" said Nancy. "It came here with John's great-great-grandmother when she was married. She brought her plenishing, as they called it, in it. It is full now of the most lovely old household linen. Damask cloths like satin, linen as fine as pocket-handkerchiefs, and all as white as snow and scented with lavender. Some of it is beautifully embroidered, and all the stitching is exquisite. Andrews keeps the key, and she will be proud to show it to you, and to tell you long stories about it."

"And what room is that?" asked Charlotte, suddenly, laying her hand on the handle of the locked door, as Nancy had done a week or two before.

Nancy's brow puckered itself into a little annoyed frown. She had hoped Charlotte would not notice that door, and had gone on talking about the linen press in order to divert her attention.

"It is a private room of John's," she answered quietly. "He keeps it locked because he does not like his things meddled with."

Charlotte said no more and went on downstairs, to Nancy's great relief, but she soon found that the trouble was not over.

"Which is the window of that locked room?" she asked, as they sat at tea on the lawn that afternoon.

"That little oriel," said Nancy, pointing with the sugar-tongs; "it is over the morning-room."

"Oh, then it must be rather a small room. Does John paint in it?"

"Sometimes he does."

"But it cannot have a good light for painting. I thought artists were very particular about the light."

Nancy said nothing, and after carefully selecting a cake from the basket Charlotte began again.

"It is very queer he should keep that room locked. Does he lock the studio?"

"N—n—o," said Nancy slowly, "not generally. If he goes away he sometimes does."

"Then why does he lock that room?"

"Because he chooses to do so," said Nancy sharply. "Surely he may lock a door in his own house if he likes."

"Don't get so cross, Nan. Surely I may ask a question."

"I beg your pardon," said Nancy, remembering that she could not quarrel with a visitor in her own house; "you see the studio is

different, Chatty. It is away from the rest of the house, and there are certain rules concerning it which are known to everybody; but this room is in the middle of the house, and Andrews is so fond of dusting and cleaning she might go in to sweep or even send one of the maids in. So I suppose John feels it is safer to lock the door."

Charlotte measured the distance from the oriel window to those on either side of it with her eye.

"It must be a small room," she said. "Is it as large as the morning-room?"

"Yes, I think it must be as large as that," said Nancy. "Would you like to come on the river after tea, Chatty?"

"Yes, it would be very nice. But I can't make out that room, Nan. I can't quite see where the chimney goes. Is there a fireplace in it?"

"Oh, I should think so."

"You think so!" exclaimed Charlotte, putting down her cup to stare at Nancy. "Have you never been in it?"

"No." Nancy got up from her basket chair as she spoke and began to re-arrange the roses in the old china bowl on the table with her faced turned away from her cousin.

"Well, I never did! Won't he even let *you* go into it?"

"There is nothing to go in for," said Nancy, trying to speak lightly, but with a provoking quiver in her voice.

"But still I should think you would like to go all over your own house," said Charlotte. "Did you say you wanted to go in?"

"I asked what room it was, and John said he used it for painting," said Nancy evasively.

"And he did not want you to go into it," concluded Charlotte. "You may depend upon it, Nancy, there is something hidden in that room."

Nancy laughed; but the laugh sounded a little forced. "What fancies you do take, Chatty. A front room on the principal landing is such a likely place for a mystery. Do you think there is a secret also in Andrews' store-room and in the iron cupboard in the library?"

"It is all very well to joke," said Charlotte seriously, "but if that room had been used for anything he did not wish you to know about, he would naturally keep you out until he had entirely removed all traces. If I were you I should insist on going into it."

Nancy turned towards her with a good deal of dignity for her years and size.

"I think you interfere too much in my affairs," she said, "and I should like you to understand that John and I can manage our house ourselves. If you would still like to go on the river I will send Martin to get the boat and row you. I have remembered that I have letters to write."

"I will not trouble Martin, thank you," said Charlotte; "I have

letters to write also. I hope by the time yours are done you will feel better, Nancy." And they both went into the house.

Charlotte went to the library, and on her way up to dress for dinner put three letters into the post-box; but it is to be hoped Nancy's letters were not important, for she retired to her bedroom and was seen no more until she came down to dinner, pale and heavy-eyed, and looking suspiciously like a girl who had indulged in the luxury of a good cry.

"What is the matter, Nan?" asked her husband, when he came out on to the terrace after dinner and found her standing by herself watching Charlotte, who had stepped down on to the lawn, where she was vainly trying to induce the peacock, which had retired for the night, to come out again.

Nancy slipped her hand into his arm.

"I have a little headache," she said; "it isn't much, John."

"Yes, it is," said John savagely, "it is that girl, I know. She has been worrying you. Has your mind been beaten with sticks again, Nannie?"

Nancy laughed. "Never mind her, John, she won't be here much longer. She is going to-morrow afternoon."

"And a good thing too," growled John, in a most inhospitable manner. "If she were my cousin she should never cross the threshold again. I am sure she makes you wretched."

"Oh, no, she doesn't, John. It is not as bad as that. I am really fond of her, and sometimes we get on beautifully. It is only that I am so silly. She knows she can tease me, and so she does it."

"And I won't have it done. She shall find out that you have someone to take care of you."

"Yes," and Nancy moved a little closer to him with a contented smile, "but it was I made my headache, John. I was rather cross with Chatty after tea, and I am afraid I was a little rude to her. It was that that worried me. Here she comes. Be nice to her this last evening, John. Doesn't she look pretty?"

"Handsome is that handsome does," remarked John, but his artist eye could not fail to note that Charlotte made a very attractive picture as she came slowly up the steps of the terrace, her dark eyes and hair and bright colouring well set off by her black lace dress and amber ribbons. She glanced gaily at Nancy, who was looking very small and young in her soft white dress, and held up a long peacock feather.

"He won't come out," she cried. "They say the peacock is a vain bird, but I think he cannot be, or he would not miss such an opportunity of displaying himself. How lovely his tail would look spread out in the moonlight. I found this feather though; is it not a beauty?" She came up and, joining John and Nancy, looked at the front of the house, opposite which they were standing. "How beautiful it looks with the moon shining on it," she said. "By the

way, John, what is that little room with the oriel window? Nancy says she has never been into it."

"You have described it correctly," said John, turning to walk along the terrace, holding Nancy's hand within his arm, while Charlotte walked on his other side. "It is just a little room with an oriel window. Nancy, if you and Chatty would like, we might go on the river for half an hour. The moon is rising, and—"

"Oh, it would be charming!" cried Nancy. "Come on, Chatty!"

"Is your head well enough?" asked John anxiously. "Can you go in those fine frocks?"

"Oh, yes, my head is better and our frocks will not hurt! Chatty's is black, and mine will wash. Besides, the boat is not dirty."

"You must get some thicker shoes then, and your hats, for the dew is falling, and some shawls or wraps."

"And waterproofs and umbrellas, I should think, you dear old fidget!" said Nancy saucily. "Come, Chatty, we will get the shoes."

She came running back in a minute with her sailor hat on and a little red cloak over her white muslin dress.

"There, John, am I not good?"

"You have on your shoes?" Nancy stuck out a well-shod little foot. "And your hat and cloak? Yes. You are a good girl. I say, Nan, is it that room she has been worrying you about?"

"Yes—no," said Nancy. "She only asked questions just as she always does. If I were not silly, I should not mind. Don't you trouble about her, John. She does not mean to be so tiresome. It is the way she was made. Here she is. Come on, or we shall not get the best effect of the moonlight."

Charlotte left the next day and other visitors came—Nancy's father and mother and two of her sisters. Later on, when they had gone, John persuaded her to go with him to the sea, and afterwards to pay some visits, so that it was October when they were again settled at the Burnetts. The garden had lost its summer beauty, but was still gay with chrysanthemums and dahlias and beautiful with autumn tints, while the house was if possible more attractive than it had been before, now there were fires on the low wide hearths and a most home-like air of comfort everywhere.

Unfortunately for Nancy, as the days grew more dark and winterly her husband was obliged to be a good deal away from home in the daytime, so that she was more alone than she had been since her marriage. He suggested that she should invite a friend to stay with her, but she declared she would rather endure a little solitude in the daytime than spoil the pleasure of the long *tête-à-tête* evenings which she enjoyed so much. In the evening, when John read aloud or talked to her, or listened while she sang to him, she was quite happy and bright; but the quiet mornings and dusky afternoons were very

depressing, and she wished with all her heart that some congenial neighbour lived near enough to come and sit with her for an hour occasionally.

November was very damp and dreary that year, and as Nancy sat by the morning-room fire and watched the rain beating against the windows, and longed for the sound of John's footstep and his cheery whistle she gradually became possessed—no other word adequately describes her feeling—with an overmastering desire to go into the room with the oriel window.

On the days when he did not go to town, John began to use the room, and Nancy was frequently startled by the sound of movement overhead. She used to listen nervously for it at last, and tortured herself with trying to interpret the noises she heard and to imagine what he could be doing there. Once when he was out she heard a slow ponderous footstep that she was sure could only belong to Andrews, and when Nancy ran upstairs she met the comfortable figure of the old woman just outside the door with a dustpan and duster in her hand.

"I have been allowed to pick up a bit of dust at last," she said triumphantly. "It had got too bad for master, so he said I might go myself, but not send any of those maids." And she smiled beamingly at Nancy, who went on to her own room with the miserable feeling at her heart more unbearable than ever.

If John had had any idea of her feelings, he would have insisted on her having company, and would either have satisfied her curiosity or laughed her out of it; but when she was with him all her doubts and cravings vanished, and she was as merry as ever, making light of her solitary hours and declaring that she was quite happy with her books and work and her little Yorkshire terrier Peter. Once or twice when she was more grave and quiet than usual he asked what was the matter; but she always answered "Nothing," for she had sufficient sense to be heartily ashamed of the morbid feelings she seemed to have no power to resist.

"I wonder what he is doing there," she said to herself one morning as she sat listening to the almost unceasing sound of footsteps overhead. "I wonder if he is really painting. I don't think he ever said he painted there. I wish he would let me go in. I think it is too bad of him."

She wandered idly upstairs in the course of the morning and stood outside the locked door; but she only heard John's quick light step and his voice softly humming a tune. Peter put his nose against the bottom of the door and whined and scraped until it was suddenly opened and John came out, carefully shutting it behind him.

"What do you want, you little beggar?" he cried as the dog jumped on him joyfully. "Why, Nan, I did not see you! Do you want anything, darling?"

Nancy was kneeling on the window seat looking out through the coloured glass. She turned towards him as he stood with his back to the door.

"Yes," she said, "I want——" She intended to say "to go into that room," but something made her stop. She was sure John would only laugh and call her Fatima, and tease her about her feminine curiosity, so she only said, "I want *you*, John."

He came over to the window and put his arm round her.

"Tired of Peter's society, Nancy? Well, you do look rather dull. Is it raining still? No, I think not. If you will put on your thick shoes, I will take you for a walk before lunch."

Nancy's face brightened, and she ran to get her hat, not knowing that she had lost her best chance of discovering the secret she pined to know; for, if she had asked her husband then, he would most probably have yielded to her desire and taken her into the room.

"Wet again!" said Nancy when she came down to breakfast next morning. "I do hope you are going to stay at home to-day, John!"

"I wish I could, but I am afraid it is impossible. I have an appointment about a picture I hope to be commissioned to paint, and after that there is a committee I must attend."

Nancy made a face.

"I always thought artists were nice, comfortable, idle sort of men," she said; "but you are as busy and business-like as though you were a banker or a lawyer. Can you be back to lunch?"

"I am afraid not; but I will try to be here by tea-time, and then we will have a walk if it clears."

Nancy drove to the station with him by way of variety, and then came back and played with Peter, who was nearly as disconsolate as his mistress on account of the wet weather.

"Now, I wonder what I can do to fill up the morning and make it go quickly," she thought, when Peter politely intimated that he had romped sufficiently, and was ready for a nap. "I know! I will tidy that dreadful cupboard in John's dressing-room. He said I might do it if I liked."

Pleased with the bright idea, Nancy ran gaily upstairs humming a song. There was a bright fire in the dressing-room; Peter, who had followed her with the air of a martyr, settled himself comfortably in an easy-chair, and Nancy set to work with a will, determined to have the cupboard in perfect order by the time John returned.

"What a place!" she exclaimed, as she opened the door and surveyed John's miscellaneous possessions crowded together in considerable confusion. "I shall tell Chatty that I have been permitted to turn out a cupboard. She will think John is beginning to have confidence in me at last;" and she laughed, as she stood on a chair and attacked the top shelf.

She had almost finished, and was thinking that it would soon be time to wash her hands and go down to lunch when she saw something shining at the back of one of the shelves, and picking it up she found it was a good-sized key—the key of a room door.

"I wonder what that is the key of," thought Nancy. "Perhaps John has lost it and will be glad to have it again. Perhaps—" And then a sudden idea struck her. She sat down with the key in her hand, looking at it as if it fascinated her. Was it—could it be the lost key of the oriel room?

She sat still for a minute or two, then she got up, replaced the few things that yet remained, closed the cupboard door and went out on to the landing with the key in her hand. She did not at first really intend to go into the oriel room; she meant to see if the key fitted, but beyond that she had no settled purpose.

The key did fit, it turned easily and noiselessly, the door opened just a little, and Nancy stood irresolute with it in her hand. Should she go in? Should she close and lock the door again and put the key in the dressing-room cupboard? Patter, patter came Peter's little feet across the landing in search of his mistress; scrape, scrape went Peter's paws against it as he pushed first his inquisitive nose and then his silky little body through the door.

"Peter, Peter, come out," cried Nancy. But Peter, who was snuffing all about the room, took no notice, and after a moment's hesitation she followed him, carefully closing and locking the door behind her.

There was, as John had said, no furniture save one chair, a tall light step-ladder, an easel and a wooden case, on the top of which were scattered brushes, paints, a sketch-book and a few photographs. Nancy looked round with curious eyes for two or three minutes, while the pretty colour slowly faded from her face, then with a low bitter cry she sank down on the dusty floor and lay there, her face hidden in her hands, sobbing as if her heart would break.

Yet she had seen nothing dreadful, no ghastly sight, no relic of a bitter past had met her wondering gaze. The walls of the room were tinted a delicate lovely shade of green; round the top a most dainty frieze had been painted composed of sprays of the flower sometimes known as "Pretty Nancy" arranged in a kind of graceful arabesque; beneath this the walls were divided into panels by sprays of the same flower, and in the panels the most exquisite views had been painted, each one framed in a tracery of flowers of various kinds, but every flower used was one for which Nancy had a special regard. She had not had time to take in every detail, nor to recognise each view, but she had seen enough to know that the decoration of that room was being done as a love gift for her, and that in due time, if she had but waited patiently, John would have had the great pleasure of surprising her with it. Over the fireplace was a beautiful little overmantel with

quaint shelves and cupboards, and in the centre was a picture of her old home, while among the wreaths and trailing branches of wild rose that encircled it were the dear home faces—her father and mother, and her young sisters and brothers. Nancy knew now why John had been so anxious to sketch them during their visit, and why he had stolen their photographs from her case. On the other walls were painted views of the places she had admired most during their year of travel, and the ceiling had a lovely centre-piece and cornice of flowers and children's faces. Only one panel remained unfinished, and yet it was all spoiled, for now John could never surprise her with it, she could never take pleasure in it, and, far worse than that, her life was spoiled also, for she could never look John in the face again.

The sound of the luncheon gong roused her, and getting up slowly and stiffly, to the great relief of Peter, who, after snuffing all about her, had seated himself by her side in astonished misery, she sadly left the room, locked the door, and putting the key in her pocket went to her own room and rang the bell.

She was lying on the sofa when the maid came up, with her face turned to the wall.

"I have a very bad headache," she said, without turning round, "and I do not want any luncheon."

"But you will have something, ma'am," said the girl kindly: all the servants loved their young mistress. "Let me bring something up here."

"No, thank you," answered Nancy, "I do not want anything. You may bring me a cup of tea at four o'clock. I want to be quiet until then. If anyone should call tell Parry to say I am not well."

Ten minutes later Andrews came up with a cup of soup. She was greatly concerned at Nancy's indisposition, insisted on her taking the soup, and stood over her while she did so.

"There is nothing for a nervous headache like food," she said. "And when Lydia came down and said you did not want any lunch I knew what you ought to have. It is lucky I had some of that soup ready. I used to make it for my old mistress and for Miss Joyce when they were not well. It is very nourishing, and there is nothing in it to upset you. There, you will feel better for that, ma'am." And Andrews took the cup with an anxious look at Nancy's flushed face and heavy eyes. "Your hand is rather hot, ma'am; I do hope as you are not sickening for anything."

Nancy smiled faintly in spite of her trouble.

"No, I do not think that is likely," she said. "I am not ill. It is only a bad headache. I could not have taken that soup if I had been ill."

Andrews shook her head mournfully.

"That is nothing to go by," she said; "there was my cousin Sarah's husband's first wife, she took a great basin of arrowroot

when we thought she was recovering from the influenza, took it quite hearty and with a relish, and in less than an hour she was a corpse."

Nancy laughed hysterically, and then, as the only way of putting an end to Andrews' sympathy and reminiscences, she lay back and shut her eyes, upon which Andrews retired, sighing and groaning in the manner she considered suitable under the circumstances.

At four o'clock she appeared again with a cup of tea; in the usual way Andrews expected the maids to do their own work, but in case of illness no one but herself might approach the invalid.

"I am afraid your head is no better, ma'am," she said, and certainly Nancy, who had spent most of the afternoon in crying, looked considerably worse than she had done before.

"No, it isn't better yet," she said, as she took the tea from the tray. "I don't want anything to eat, thank you, Andrews; and please tell Mr. Wedderburn, when he comes, that I do not feel able to come down, and that I do not want any dinner. I am going to bed presently."

"Just take this little bit of toast," begged Andrews, "which I made myself, and so I know it is nice and crisp. Lydia wanted to bring your tea, but I knew I should have to coax you to eat, like I used to coax Miss Joyce. She would always eat something if I brought it, so I felt I must come up myself, though I was in the middle of getting my dinner ready, which Harriet is most surely spoiling at this very minute."

"Then go down again," said Nancy, whose great desire was to be let alone. "Thank you for coming, and the tea and toast are very nice, but I do not want Mr. Wedderburn's dinner to be spoiled."

"And much he will care about his dinner if you can't come down to eat it with him," said Andrews, putting the cup back on the tray, and skilfully mending the fire. "Shall I send Lydia up to you, ma'am?"

"No, thank you, I will ring if I want her. Mr. Wedderburn will be in soon after five and will want some tea. And please take Peter down with you."

Andrews called Peter, who very unwillingly got off the couch, where he had been lying on Nancy's feet; and remarking that she would come up again when she had sent the dinner in, she retired to rescue the preparations for that important meal from the destructive hands of the kitchen-maid.

As soon as she was alone Nancy hurriedly undressed and got into bed, for she knew that John would come up directly he reached home, and her only refuge from his loving looks and questions was to feign sleep, which she did with a fair amount of success; for John was too much afraid of disturbing her to bring the light very near, or to touch her; so after looking anxiously at a small portion of a flushed

cheek and a tumbled mass of fair hair, and listening to her breathing, which seemed to him quick and irregular, he went sorrowfully downstairs.

Nancy had her breakfast in bed the next morning, and did not come down until just before luncheon, when she crept quietly into the dining-room, looking very pale, with dark circles under her eyes; simply played with the food on her plate, said nothing except the shortest possible replies to John's anxious questions, and broke into hysterical crying when he begged her to try and eat something. For the first time in her life she wished business would take him to town, but he remained at home all day and wanted her to go for a drive after luncheon, which she refused to do, as she said she was too tired and would rather go back to her room.

She remained there alone all the afternoon, and when John went up at five o'clock to ask if she would come down to tea, he found her lying flat on her back on the sofa with her hands under her head, staring at the ceiling with eyes full of misery.

"I would rather have some tea up here," she said, without looking at him, "and then I am going to bed."

"Are you ill, Nancy? I wish you would tell me what is the matter, dear? I think I shall send for Dr. Baynham."

"Oh, no, I am not ill," replied Nancy, in the same dreary voice. "I wish you would not trouble about me. Don't send for the doctor. He can't do me any good."

"But, my darling, you must be ill. You are not at all like yourself. Tell me all about it, Nancy."

He sat down on the edge of the couch and took her hand in his, but Nancy buried her face in the cushion and began to cry again, begging him to promise he would not send for the doctor.

The next day she came downstairs as usual, but looked wretchedly ill and was very silent. She went for a drive with John, and did everything he asked her to do, but all with an absence of interest and enjoyment that was quite foreign to her nature. Somewhat to her surprise John said no more about sending for the doctor; he tried to persuade her to eat and to go out, but he ceased to ask her any questions about her health, and though he was very patient and gentle with her his manner towards her was more pitying than anxious.

"Shall you love me always, John?" she asked, on the afternoon of the third day as they sat together after tea; and it was the first time she had spoken except in reply to questions.

"Always," said John, taking her cold limp little hand into his warm firm clasp, "as long as I live—and longer. You are always my own little Nancy, whatever happens."

"Even if I did—something very bad?" asked Nancy, with a little catch in her voice.

"Even then. You might hurt me very much, you might break

my heart, Nancy, because I love you so much, but nothing you could do would kill my love for you."

Nancy moved uneasily in her chair, and tried to take her hand away, but it was held fast. She wanted to tell him all, but the words would not come; she glanced up and met his eyes, full of love and pity, and her own filled with tears.

"I wish you did not love me so much," she sobbed.

"Why, Nancy?"

"Because—because—I don't—deserve it. Oh, John, don't—be so—good to me. I can't—can't—bear it."

John put his arm around her and drew her close to him in spite of her resistance.

"Yes, you can, dear. You could not bear it if I was not good to you. Don't cry so, Nancy, it will be all right again. If you love me— You do, don't you?" Nancy clung to him a little more closely. "Yes, I knew you did. Well, if you love me and I love you, nothing else can matter very much."

Nancy did not answer. She sat up and looked sadly into the fire for some minutes, then she said slowly—

"I think I should like to go home."

"Home, Nancy?"

"To my old home—to Longcourt," said Nancy.

"It is not nice weather for travelling," said John, "but if you want it very much I think perhaps I might take you next week for a few days."

"I want to stay there a long time"—Nancy spoke in a low tone and her face was hidden by her hand—"and—I want to go by myself."

"Nancy! Do you want to go away from me?"

Nancy snatched her hand from his, and, kneeling on the rug, poked the fire fiercely.

"I can't help it," she said. "I— Oh, John, don't look at me like that!" She was determined not to cry any more. She wished John would go and leave her by herself, but he showed no sign of doing so, and as she knelt with her back to him she could feel that his eyes were still fixed upon her.

"Nancy," he said at last, "have you lost anything?"

He spoke in quite his usual tone of voice, and Nancy turned round with a little surprise at the sudden change of the subject.

"Have I lost anything?" she repeated. It seemed to her as if she had lost almost everything she cared for within the last three days. "I think I am stupid," she said drearily; "I do not know what you mean."

John took something out of his pocket.

"Is that yours, Nancy?" he asked. "I found it yesterday—upstairs," and he gave her a little fine white handkerchief with "Nancy" daintily embroidered in one corner; a handkerchief

that was limp and crushed as though it had been soaked with tears.

Nancy took it, and looked first at it and then into her husband's face as if she still failed to understand.

"Do you know where I found it, Nancy? Do you—— Why, Nancy, darling, it doesn't matter. Nancy!"

She was crying in earnest now, but John held her in his arms; he whispered lovingly that she was not to fret, he was not angry, it did not matter, nothing mattered except that his little Nancy should be happy again, until all the bitterness and misery seemed to go out of her heart and the tears she shed were almost happy ones.

"John," she said at last, sitting up and pushing the tumbled curly locks out of her eyes, "I am a very wicked woman, and if you despised me half as much as I despise myself, you would not want to have anything more to do with me."

"I do not allow any one to despise my little wife," said John, "and if she gets into mischief and I choose to forgive her, it is nobody's business but mine and hers. Now, Mrs. Fatima, tell me how it all happened."

"And the worst of it is you can never surprise me now," lamented Nancy when she had finished her story.

"Oh, yes, I can," asserted John cheerfully. "You have no idea of my powers."

"And it was so horrid of me."

"We won't say any more about that. You know, Nancy, I think it was rather hard on you, but the fact is, I intended to finish it before you came here at all, only I did not get on as fast as I expected, and then you developed such a tremendous desire to come."

"My fault again," groaned Nancy; "but it was partly Chatty. She worried me so."

"Happy thought!" exclaimed John. "We will put all the blame on Chatty. I always knew that girl meant mischief."

"She did not mean it," said Nancy, "only unfortunately she did it. She was always saying that you had something hidden in that room that I was not to see."

John burst out laughing.

"Wives' heads or something of that sort, I suppose. Nancy, you are a dear little goose."

"I did not believe her, you know, John. I did trust you, really; only when I found the key the temptation was too great—and Peter pushed the door open."

"Good again. We shall be all right presently, when we give all the blame to Chatty and the rest to Peter."

"I am not going to be so mean as that," cried Nancy. "I was a horrid little doubting curious thing."

"And this shall be your punishment. You shall keep that key

and not go into the room until I give you leave. Now go and make yourself look like my pretty Nancy and eat a good dinner. And remember one thing, Nan, the next time you have a great desire, tell your husband and don't go unlocking doors for yourself. And that is my last word on the subject."

It was on the first day of the new year that Nancy found on her plate at breakfast a silver key, with, attached to it by a green ribbon, an ivory label on which was written in letters of gold "Open, Sesame."

She gazed across at her husband with a smile, and a look in her eyes that was half gladness and half pain.

"Yes," he said, "it is ready for you now, and you are to be as much surprised as possible."

"It is easy to be surprised," exclaimed Nancy when she had opened the door with her silver key, the handle of which was formed of the letters J and N twined together, "for I never saw anything so perfect. Where did you get such lovely furniture, John, and such a carpet? And all my favourite books and photographs! Oh, John, you *are* good!"

"And you like it, Nancy?"

"Like it!" Nancy's eyes had to be eloquent, for her words failed her. "I thought once, John, that I should never bear to enter this room again, but now—"

"Now, Nancy?"

"I love it! You were so good to me, John, that I have forgotten my badness; I can only remember the other side. And it is almost worth while to have been such a little goose to have found out how very good you are. Only, John, *please* don't call me 'Fatima.'"

John laughed and kissed her.

"I won't, except when you deserve it. Now don't you want to show your room to Chatty?"

"No," cried Nancy decidedly; "when she comes I shall lock the door and not let her know what is inside."

But anyone who knows Nancy will feel quite sure that terrible threat was not likely to be carried out, and John Wedderburn only laughed at the small determined face and shook his head doubtfully as he watched her hang up the wonderful key on the peg he had provided for the purpose.

LENA TYACK.



THE WOMAN'S SHARE.

SURE it looks the same, but 'tis all different too;
 I spin an' knit an' sing in the way I used to do.
 But the spindle pricks my finger, an' my voice dies down—
 For where's the use o' watching at the road from the town?

Sunrise, sunset—slow goes the day!
 'Tis here he was, an' I am here,
 An' he is gone away.

Violets at the brook-side, I smell them as I pass:
 But where's the lad that picked them as we laughed along the
 grass—
 "No bluer than your two eyes"? How soon do eyes grow
 dim?

Mine have learnt the tear-sting since last they looked on him.
 Sunrise, sunset—ah, the weary day!
 'Tis here he was, an' I am here,
 An' he is gone away.

Winds in the autumn, to lash the waves to roar;
 He is on the sea, maybe—I am on the shore.
 Tossing mat o' seawrack, tangle weed afloat,
 Have you been the lucky one? Did you touch his boat?
 Sunset, sunrise—long night and day!

'Tis here he was, and I am here,
 An' he is gone away.

Winter comes along at last, an' the snow is spread
 Cold an' white an' even, like a face that's dead.
 Women love a lifetime—that's not the way with men;
 'Tis I'll be old an' ugly—an' will he love me then?
 Sunrise, sunset—ah, the weary day!

'Tis here he was, an' I am here,
 An' he is gone away.

A. M. F.



WAY-SIDE SKETCHES IN EAST ANGLIA.

"THE North for largeness, the West for wealth,
The South for buildings, but the East for health."

So says an old Norfolk proverb, true to-day, no doubt, but scarcely justified by history; for in times of pestilence no part of England has suffered like the flat, marshy east, and the Fen country. When the black death swept over England in 1340, nearly two-thirds of the population perished. Loss of population meant loss of trade, and many east country towns have never recovered their former prosperity from that day to this, while others have dwindled into utter insignificance.

East Anglia has always retained somewhat distinctive characteristics from the time that Cedric the Saxon won a foothold on the sands of Yarmouth till the days of Cromwell, when, with the "Eastern Counties Association" at his back, he wrenched England's kingship from her king.

Even to-day, when railroads and newspapers have brought the remotest districts in touch with the world, local characteristics are strongly marked. Many of the words and expressions used by the illiterate are pure Saxon, and some few common nouns still retain their old Anglo-Saxon plurals, as "housen" for houses and "nasten" for nests. The countryman's vocabulary is somewhat limited as a rule, and "t'" or "ta" plays a very important part in most of his sentences, being used indifferently for the, this, that, or it. Thus a child will say "Here t' cum" of a man or a train, or "I harnt a-brained ta" for "I do not understand." A curious example of the muddle that is often made in conjugating verbs may be found in an epitaph at Honing in Norfolk:—

"A tender Mother she have been,
And many changes she have seen,
And when on earth she did her best,
We hope her soul is now at rest."

But the advent of the School Board is fast enlarging and correcting the children's vocabulary; unfortunately they too often learn to translate the musical "Here t' be" into "Ere it is." But no true East Anglian ever drops his h's on his own account, though the aid of a cockney Board-school teacher soon initiates him.

It is curious to note how many words the Norfolkers and Suffolkers still have in common with their distant kin in Saxony. Listening to peasants chatting at some distance, the two dialects might almost be confused. The similarity is doubtless partly due to intonation. There is the same deliberate sing-song, the inclination to raise the

voice in the middle of a sentence then drop to a drawling chant-like close. The same long-drawn-out sentences, the absence of break or alteration in the rate of speaking, the absence of vivacity and the presence of a steady, patient stolidity, as characteristic of the people as it is of their language. The Sächisch of the peasant, too, has escaped the methodical care of German grammarians, and many a word would be homely to an illiterate Suffolker that might prove utterly unintelligible to an educated German.

Nowhere are the local peculiarities more strongly marked than among the Norfolk Broads—that happy hunting-ground of artist and fisherman—where the very highways are waterways, and the great brown-sailed wherries take the place of carts—a land of sky and water, of poppies and water-lilies.

It is said that once a light-hearted artist came down to “paint the Broads.” He tried, but failed to catch their spirit, then tried again, and yet again, till gradually the fascination of the land took hold of him. For seven years he never left the Broads, but studied on, the willing slave of art, till slowly the wonderful colours and the peaceful levels crept into his very heart. And when his self-appointed years of study were passed, behold, their spell lay yet stronger on him than before, and so he lived and died in the land of the Broads. Many artists come and go, but very few, if any, can truly portray the poetry and charm of the wind-swept reeds or the depth of colour in the shallow water.

East Anglia is very rich in architectural antiquities. The traces of Saxon work may be few and far between, but there are many splendid examples of Norman buildings, particularly the curious old Norman round towers which are found in no other part of England.

Framlingham in Suffolk is an excellent example of a feudal castle—one of the most perfect specimens in existence, it is said—but unfortunately it is only a shell, for, in accordance with the eccentric will of its owner, the interior was entirely destroyed in the seventeenth century. Bury St. Edmunds ranks next to Glastonbury in the interest and antiquity of its ecclesiastical ruins. Little now remains but the tower, or church gate—one of the finest specimens of Norman architecture in England—and the fourteenth century west gate.

There are many legends connected with St. Edmund, after whom the town was named, some of which are doubtless more or less founded on fact. It is said that Ragnar Lodbrok, a famous Danish pirate of royal descent, being shipwrecked on the Norfolk coast, was taken to Edmund's court. The king treated him with great kindness, and Ragnar, who was a fearless huntsman and skilled in hawking, soon became a favourite.

One day while out hunting he was murdered by the king's falconer, whose jealousy he had aroused. The body was discovered by means of a faithful greyhound who kept watch over it, and went occasionally

to the Court for food. In punishment the falconer was ordered to be cast adrift in an open boat without sail or oars ; he drifted to the coast of Denmark, and there told Ragnar's sons that their father had been murdered by King Edmund.

Tradition says it was in consequence of this that the Danes invaded England. Edmund was defeated in a great battle near Hoxne. According to some, he escaped to Framlingham, and then gave himself up to his enemies in the hopes of saving the lives of some of his subjects. There is also a legend that he hid under a bridge near Hoxne, but the sparkle of the moonbeams on his golden spurs attracted the attention of a young couple just married who were going to their new home. They betrayed their king, and Edmund laid a curse on the bridge, so that no wedding-party has dared pass that way, from that day to this.

When he fell into the hands of the Danes he infuriated them by refusing to abandon the Christian religion. He was chained to a tree and shot at with arrows, then finally beheaded. Tradition always pointed to a certain old tree in the park at Hoxne as the spot where he was martyred, and when it fell in 1849 an arrowhead was found embedded in its trunk. Edmund's body was recovered by his followers, and the head was found guarded by a wolf, and when laid together the head and body were miraculously reunited again so that no trace of their separation was visible.

Edmund was afterwards canonised and his remains finally buried in an old church built by Sigebert, where they are reported to have possessed miraculous powers of healing. Canute afterwards founded a great Benedictine monastery in his memory ; it was called after the saint in whose honour it was raised—St. Edmunds Bury or Bury St. Edmunds : bury-being the same as the Saxon buri, burg or burgh, a strong town or fort.

East Anglia seems to have reached its zenith during the fourteenth century. Religious enthusiasm has left a record of commercial success in the magnificent churches of this period.

Unfortunately the over-zealous followers of Oliver Cromwell have done much to wreck these beautiful churches. While waging their illogical warfare against all that was beautiful, they not only destroyed the pictures and images that offended their principles, but wantonly destroyed the permanent structure of the buildings, desecrating the monuments of the dead. It is quite pathetic to read in Dowsing's Journal of the ruthless destruction of works of art, many of which were doubtless the outcome of years of patient, loving labour bestowed by the monks of old.

Whatever a man's principles may be, he must at least acknowledge that it is to these same monks that England owes the building of her great cathedrals and churches, the preservation of her early literature and history, and the education of her people. Ecclesiastical architecture has never recovered from Henry VIII.'s indiscriminate dissolution

of the monasteries. No lay builder who must reckon the cost can erect such buildings. It is only where the lavish care, the ungrudging time and labour, and self-sacrificing love of the enthusiast are employed that such noble architecture can be raised. Strong, and true, and beautiful, every detail perfect in itself, a sign of the reverence and devotion that has brought it into being.

The splendid "perpendicular" church at Southwold seems to have escaped with wonderfully little damage. The church has a fine open timber roof with carved hammer beams, the part over the chancel being painted. Also a beautiful Tudor screen with painted panels. There is some fine oak carving in the chancel in the serio-grotesque style so beloved by the mediæval monks. An even queerer collection is to be found on the pew-heads at Blythborough, where, among others, there are figures of a miser hugging his money-bags and a sluggard pulling his bedclothes up to his chin! Both churches also possess a Jack in armour, or Jack-smite-the-clock as he is sometimes called, the carved and painted figure of a man holding an axe in his hand, with which he strikes a bell when the clergyman is robed and the service about to begin.

There is a quaint little out-of-the-way village on the coast of Suffolk, miles from a station, and quite beyond the ken of the ordinary tourist, a little village that can boast as remote an origin and as important a history as many a modern city. This village was once the most important city in East Anglia; it was called Dunwich, from the Saxon Dun, a hilly down, and Wyc, a fort or winding stream, both of which it possessed. Many traces of Roman occupation have been found, but it was not till Saxon times that it rose into prominence.

When Sigebert became king of East Anglia, he was very anxious to improve the condition of his subjects—they were chiefly Pagans—for the repeated raids of Jutes, Picts and Scots, and other barbarians, had almost stamped out the earlier seeds of Christianity. In 630 Sigebert established an Episcopal See at Dunwich, the first in East Anglia, and made Felix of Burgundy bishop. He could not have had a better helpmate, for Felix seems to have united a rigorous capacity for organisation with the learning of a scholar and the simple-hearted piety of a holy man. Of the many centres of civilisation and learning that sprang up around him Felixstowe still commemorates his name. Cambridge is said to owe its creation as a seat of learning to the influence of Felix upon King Sigebert.

Gardener, in his history of Dunwich, has given much interesting information about the place, its prosperity and magnificence, its charters and charities, the favours it received from royalty, and the ships it sent to war. But there came a time in its history when the force of wind and tide swept away its port, and the men of Dunwich, seeing commercial ruin before them, appealed to King Edward III. for help. Their appeal was not in vain, and for some time a fictitious

prosperity was preserved by the king's order that all merchandise and fish landed at the new port, near Walberswick, should be sold in Dunwich market-place.

But year after year the sea encroached, washing away now a church, now a house, now a monastery, till little by little the great city became a little town and the little town a village.

The neighbouring village of Walberswick has gradually dwindled into insignificance like Dunwich. Once it had thirteen barks trading to Iceland and the North Sea, besides twenty-two fishing boats, and could afford to build the magnificent church now in ruins.

Then gradually the depopulation began, the ravages of the plague, the loss of trade and a fire reduced the town to such poverty that it could no longer afford to keep the church in repair. First the great bell was sold, then three more bells; finally the chancel and north aisle were taken down, the materials sold, and with the money the south aisle was repaired and made into the parish church.

It is the same story over and over again in Norfolk and Suffolk. Magnificent churches built in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, telling of prosperity and religious zeal, then the gradual depopulation, till the great church becomes a burden on the villagers, they can scarcely fill one aisle, and at last the church is left to fall into decay, or is partially pulled down, and a little church made from one corner.

Of all beautiful places to see the sun set, Walberswick Ferry is unique; so simple—just a quiet little stream flowing in its grey clay bed, with grass on its banks, and little red-roofed black huts reflected in its waters. Yet it is one of those happy spots of earth which seem overflowing with light and colour; the intense blue of the sky, the fire of the sunset, and the clear atmosphere, all vibrate with purest sunlight. 'Tis a beautiful spot, where the artist loves to linger and feel the thrill of joy which only the intense love of the beautiful has made possible to his nature—linger on till the silent grey of approaching night wreaths his picture in the mystery of dreamland, and leaves him with the remembrance of one more great joy to carry with him through life.

KATHERINE W. ELWES.



LOST AND FOUND.

BY LUCY HARDY.

NEVER apparently was there a quieter, more uneventful existence than that led by Mrs. Marston, the sweet-faced elderly lady who resided in one of those neat villas which abound in our modern suburbs.

"Whenever I see that dear old thing I think she is a living example of the proverb 'Blessed are the lives which have no history,'" a giddy girl-neighbour was wont to say. And indeed Mrs. Marston's daintily-ordered abode, with its two staid domestics, and its gentle soft-voiced mistress, seemed a very asylum of peace and content; a quiet home wherein trouble and anxieties did not enter.

Mrs. Marston, who had only taken up her abode in the Avenue about a couple of years previously, was known to be a widow, apparently without many near relations, although a few old friends visited her. "But Mrs. Marston is very comfortably off, has good health, and is sweet-looking still, though she tells me she is nearly sixty; she ought to be a happy woman with all these advantages," Clara Colvil, the plain and sickly eldest daughter of the next door neighbour (whose own life was passed in a struggle to make "ends meet" for the motherless household upon her father's small salary), was often wont to sigh, half enviously.

How little any of us know of the secrets, perchance the sorrows, which our neighbours carry in their own hearts! For some ten years Helen Marston had silently borne a burthen which was none the less heavy because it was hidden in her own soul. Some thirty years previously Mrs. Marston had been the happiest of wives; united, after a lengthened period of waiting, to a man whom she adored. But Helen's experience of wedded life was but a brief one; an accident had struck down the beloved husband within a year of their marriage, and Mrs. Marston was widowed before her first child was born; a little son who opened his eyes upon the world a few weeks after his father's funeral, and upon whom the bereaved mother naturally lavished double tenderness.

Perhaps Helen had been over-indulgent to her boy; friends—always ready to be wise after the event—said this in the later years when Philip Marston, handsome and clever as he was, began to disappoint the fond hopes which his mother had once built upon him. There were faults and mistakes on all sides; unwise severity on the part of kinsfolk as well as perhaps unwise indulgence upon the mother's side; at his worst, Philip had always been affectionate to his mother, as Helen often remembered now with some ray of comfort. Matters came to a crisis at last; Philip's careless, reckless

habits had outworn the patience of the elderly relative in whose City office he was working. There was a story of dishonesty in which Philip's name was implicated—*unjustly*, as his mother always believed, holding that, at the worst, her boy had been made a scapegoat for the real offenders. But others were less lenient in their judgment, and Philip was sternly offered the alternative of a free passage to the Colonies or—a prosecution!

And then Helen had lost her son. With an angry rejection of his kinsman's proffered aid, with a few brief words of farewell to his mother, Philip had disappeared; and ten years had now rolled away, and Helen had never received a word or message from him.

"It is best so," said the elderly relative—an uncle who had been as a father to Helen herself. "Philip was only a disgrace to our whole family." But the mother's heart did not echo this hard verdict. Gentle and yielding by nature, Mrs. Marston had borne her sorrow in silence, and continued to reside with the old man to whom she had been indebted for so much kindness throughout her life. But when Mr. Vansittart's death left her alone in the world, Helen decided to remove to London, and thus break away from all the old associations and surroundings. Then, for the first time, did she venture to set on foot inquiries regarding her lost prodigal; inquiries, however, which ended in disappointment and failure. Eight years is a long interval after which to attempt to take up traces of missing relatives.

One autumn afternoon Mrs. Marston was slowly returning from a shopping expedition, carrying her purse, after the imprudent fashion affected by many country folk, in her hand. As she turned into a quiet road, she heard quick steps behind her; in another moment her purse had been twitched from her hand by a man who fled rapidly down the street; not, however, unnoticed, for a gentleman just coming out of his house immediately gave chase to the thief and a passing workman joined in the pursuit. These volunteer constables had captured the man and were holding him firmly when Mrs. Marston came hurriedly up.

"I believe you'll find your purse in the next door garden, ma'am, for I saw the fellow throw something in there as we collared him," said the gentleman. "No police about, of course, never are when they're wanted; but it's only a short walk to the station, and we'll conduct him there."

Mrs. Marston glanced at the culprit, who had apparently offered no resistance to his captors; he was a man about thirty years of age, shabbily dressed, but carrying an unmistakable air of "better days" about him. Helen looked, looked again, then turned ghastly pale and put her hand against the garden railings as if to steady herself.

"There is—some mistake," she said faintly; "please let this person go."

"Mistake? Nothing of the sort," said the gentleman. "I saw the

man snatch your purse, a most impudent theft in broad daylight. Of course it's unpleasant having to appear against anyone, but—”

“I shall never do so,” said Mrs. Marston in a low voice.

“It's a public duty, madam.”

“Ay,” chimed in the workman, “tisn't everyone as can afford to ha' their purses snatched, if ma'am can. There's too many of this sort about now. Only last week my own missus, going out a-shopping on Saturday evening, had her purse, with all the week's wages, caught away just as this feller did just now, and a hungry Sunday we had to keep after it. Maybe 'twas you, or one of your pals as did *that* job,” added the man, giving the culprit an angry look.

The thief stood perfectly still and silent, with his eyes fixed on the ground.

“Oh, *do* let him go,” cried Mrs. Marston in an imploring voice. “I do not care about my purse, and I will pay anything that this man has taken from anyone else.”

“Your kindness is misplaced, believe me, ma'am,” said the gentleman firmly. “Ha, there comes a policeman at last, I verily believe !”

Helen caught the speaker wildly by the arm.

“You *must* set this man free !” she cried desperately. “Shall I tell you the truth ? *He is my son !* Now go—and leave us together.”

The gentleman gazed for a moment in speechless surprise, first at the handsomely dressed lady, then at the shabby thief. After a moment's hesitation, he silently released his hold upon his captive, raised his hat to Mrs. Marston and walked down the street, followed by the workman. The thief made a movement as if to escape also, but loving detaining hands were laid upon his arm.

“My boy, my boy, found—found at last !” In her joy at the recovery of the prodigal, Helen could say no more.

“*Found ?*” repeated the man bitterly. “Mother, tell the truth, would you not rather have seen me dead than thus degraded ?”

“No, no, no,” cried Helen, a divine wealth of love and tenderness shining in her face ; “for the living can always repent and make restitution for the past. My son will do this now.”

“I am not worthy of your love, mother,” said the man in a low voice, “but I will say this : never before—not even when I was accused of doing so ten years ago—have I stolen until to-day. I've had a hard struggle during the past years, and I vowed never to come back to you until I had won some success. Once things seemed more hopeful for a time, but I've met with misfortunes of late, and to-night I was desperate. I was walking along, hungry and penniless, when I saw your purse carelessly carried—you know the rest.”

“We will talk no more of the past, Philip ; you will come home with me and begin a new life from to-day.”

"Just fancy," one of the gossips of the Avenue remarked a few months later, "that quiet little Mrs. Marston actually had a son whom she had lost sight of for years, and she met him, quite accidentally, one day in the street. He is living with her now; rather a silent reserved kind of young man, never cares to go into society, but works steadily all day in some City office, and comes home in the evening. He absolutely worships his mother. It is odd that they should have been separated in some way for years. I am sure there must be some story about the matter."

Yes, there was a "story" connected with the reunion of mother and son. As Helen's thankful heart often whispered, a similar narrative had been recorded in the Sacred Volume nearly two thousand years ago: "for this my son was dead, and is alive again; was lost, and is found."

THE CUP.

(FROM SULLY PRUDHOMME.)

IN the low tavern where coarse liquors flow
The draught is ready—the supply secure;
But in the costly chalice 'tis not so—
The wine must be e'en as the crystal pure.

And in the golden vase that stands on high
Upon its pedestal aloof and still,
Only the sun-kissed fruit of speckless sky
Is worthy its resplendent depths to fill.

The more the cup is common, mean and base,
The better for its use in fitting place.
The beautiful must ever stand apart.

And thus in life—the loftier the desire—
For him whose love is a celestial fire,
There is no mortal worthy of his heart.

C. E. MEETKERKE.

ST. MORITZ AND THE ENGADINE.

By CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "IN THE VALLEY OF THE RHONE," ETC., ETC.

WE were not sorry when our drive came to an end. It had been charming, even delightful: a long day's solitude amidst the changing scenes of nature; scenes that now and then almost touched the sublime.

But twelve hours' incessant travelling was sufficient for one day; and if we thought so, the horses must have been much more of the same mind. We had had two hours' rest at Mühlen, it is true; had seen the Dame Blanche drive away in the carriage she so comfortably filled; heard her history from the landlord, whose study seemed to be human nature: but that time seemed a very long way off, and with the shades of evening we were glad of repose.

A due selection was made of our ferns and wildflowers—almost sufficient to decorate the hotel—and the rest disappeared with the carriage.

The heavier luggage had been sent on by diligence from Thusis, for the sake of sparing the horses, but the landlord had told us that it was an unnecessary act of mercy, and in the end we came to the same conclusion. It was a fairly slow drive from first to last, with a great deal of walking and climbing, but the horses were accustomed to heavy loads, and looked upon us as a sort of recreation. Two ethereal beings whose combined weight amounted to about nineteen stone, admitted of a great deal in the way of "gros bagages."

We found the Kurhaus somewhat old-fashioned, but very comfortable: a long low building stretching across the valley. The manager came forward and showed us over the whole house, and we chose rooms on the top floor, which was only the second floor above the "entresol:" chose it first because they were large—one of them the largest in the house: secondly because we should have peace and quietness, and no disturbing footsteps above us—that abomination in life: thirdly because from one of the rooms there was a covered balcony worth its weight in gold, the only one the hotel possessed: and lastly because from that balcony the view was very charming. In point of economy there were cheaper rooms on the lower floors, but we thought them infinitely less pleasant. A lift—one of the modern additions—took us up in the space of about ten seconds, so that it was easier to be "lifted" to the third floor than to walk up to the first.

So far we could not be more comfortable. We liked the hotel; it was extremely well managed, the cuisine excellent, everyone atten-

tive. The visitors we did not so much like: all, almost without exception, Germans and Russians. The babel was terrific at night when they assembled in the great hall and its ante-rooms after supper; loud talking and laughter such as we had never before heard in any hotel: and which more often than not drove us into the quiet reading-room, nearly always deserted.

We were the only English in the hotel, and soon learned that the English never do go to the Kurhaus. Yet it takes first rank, and in point of situation is infinitely the best. The Kurhaus faces east and west; almost all the others face south, are more sheltered, and in summer exposed to unbearable heat. The Kurhaus, stretching across the plain, receives all the benefit of the breeze which regularly blows up the valley every morning and down the valley every afternoon.

From our windows the view was striking and beautiful. We looked down upon St. Moritz Bad, and a mile away, higher up, was St. Moritz Dorf. Most of the English frequent the latter, especially the Hôtel Kulm, an enormous building capable of holding a small town, with passages and labyrinths interminable. We went over it one morning with the manager, and before the inspection was over felt as if we had gone through a long day's march. In many ways, however, it was admirable, though facing the full burden of the south sun.

Our favourite hotel was the Palace, a little below the Kulm, overlooking the lake; a new and charming building and much the nicest in St. Moritz Dorf. To spend a winter here would be delightful for those who like skating and tobogganning. The atmosphere is dry, sunny and delightful; one sees little else than blue skies; and it is possible to spend a greater number of hours out of doors, day after day and week after week, than in most places on the level of the sea.

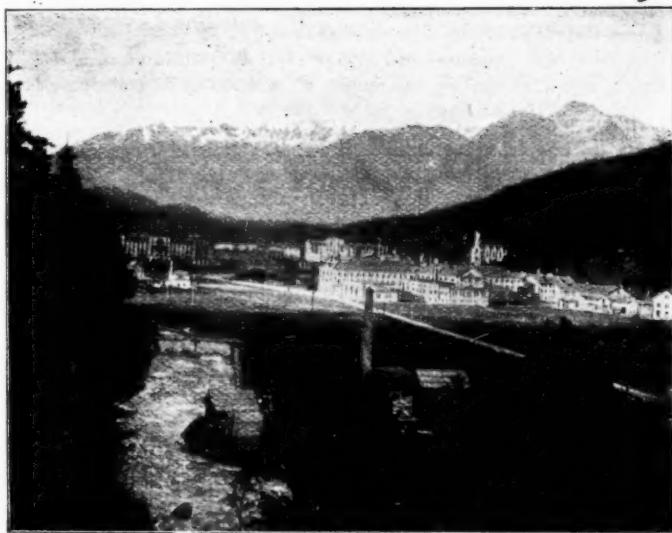
St. Moritz Dorf is the highest village in the Engadine; it is entirely free from microbes, and so is especially favourable to consumptive patients. Whether they bring microbes with them and spread danger and disease, we cannot say. It is certain that invalids go there in winter and lay up a store of health that lasts them for some years.

But the summer is a very different matter. For ourselves, we were terribly disappointed. The air no doubt is very light and rarefied, but bracing it was not. If we were 6,000 feet above the level of the sea, there were mountains another 6,000 feet above us which seemed to shut out the free winds of heaven. On those heights no doubt we should have found it bracing enough; but in the plains of St. Moritz we never felt it so. A disinclination to move about, and great fatigue after a comparatively short walk, were symptoms we had never suffered from in bracing atmospheres. At the Rochers de Naye, for instance, above Montreux, where we seemed to overlook the world from the mountain heights, at the end of two days we felt capable of walking round the world; but at the end of six weeks in St. Moritz, we felt as "unbraced" as we had felt on arriving.

This was a distinct disappointment, after all the praise we had

heard of St. Moritz at Kissingen, and all the prophecies made as to the wonders it would perform. We came to the conclusion that to send patients from Kissingen to the Engadine was a mistake. There are hundreds of better, more bracing, and more accessible places. The Engadine for merely bracing purposes is a fashion and an idea. For those suffering from distinct diseases—such as incipient consumption—it no doubt possesses hidden virtues. Those again who go to drink the waters and take the baths have a distinct object in view, and no doubt often gain their end. But the waters are unpleasant, and the baths are far less agreeable than those of Kissingen, though said to possess much the same properties.

One great virtue is undoubtedly the dryness of the air, and it is a



ST. MORITZ: KURHAUS IN THE FOREGROUND.

very great virtue: due partly to the altitude of St. Moritz and the Engadine generally, partly to the smallness of the rainfall—the smallest in Switzerland. This dryness of atmosphere is of course of supreme importance to persons of delicate lungs. The waters are said to improve the condition of the blood, whilst the air invigorates: and so delicate people absorb health as it were on all sides.

In winter there is a singular *stillness* in the air, due to its sheltered position, to the want of wind, and to the mantle of snow that covers everything, making the sunshine even more dazzling than it is, and more felt. This brightness, this thinness of air and blueness of sky, produce a strange exhilaration of spirits, in itself a great incentive to health. It is impossible, in winter, to feel depressed.

This cannot be said of summer at St. Moritz, when, on the contrary, especially on first awaking in the morning, a marked depression was often present—quickly shaken off, it is true. It may not be a usual thing to feel little or no benefit from the air of the Engadine, but we have met with many people whose experience was similar to ours. Nothing would again tempt them to St. Moritz.

Not only is the air different between summer and winter, but the whole surrounding scene. St. Moritz in the two seasons is as two different places. In summer the snow has nearly all disappeared. The hills are clothed with green, the walks through the woods are delightful, an infinity of summer excursions may be taken; the lake has a thousand reflections. But in winter it is one vast area of unbroken snow. The lake has disappeared; nothing is left to reflect the blue sky. Each season has its rare beauties, and some prefer the one and some the other.

But in both summer and winter the innumerable glaciers are throwing out their healing influences in a manner as yet imperfectly understood. The air is charged with ozone.

Apart from the air, its properties and effects, we took a dislike to the place itself, from the first hour we entered it to the hour of our departure. To begin with we were very disappointed in the place; its closed-in situation; all those surrounding hills that shut out our vision from the world beyond.

Those hills were beautiful; we do not deny it. It was charming to trace their undulations against the blue sky: to watch day by day the disappearance or reappearance of the snow upon the higher planes; charming to walk through the shady paths of the woods; but when all was said and done, one longed with a painful longing to get away from these valleys and dwell on those mountain tops. This was impossible; and the irritating impression that one's stay in St. Moritz was, in point of health, time wasted was never absent. Certainly it was pleasantly wasted; but that was due to circumstances over which St. Moritz had no control.

Yet the simple life of Kissingen was to a great extent wanting. Ladies dressed more; there was an air of greater fashion about the place; people affected more; there were dances and concerts—three hotels giving them alternate nights, of which the Kurhaus was one. At first we attributed our being the only English at the Kurhaus to arriving before the season had actually commenced, but soon discovered that the English by common consent seem to have abandoned it to the foreigners—the Germans, Russians and French—the latter a very small minority indeed.

The reason for this is that the Kurhaus is an old building and old-fashioned, and most of the other hotels are newer and more luxurious. Nevertheless, if we went to St. Moritz again, we should keep to the Kurhaus. It pleased us in many ways. In the hot summer of last year—one of the hottest ever known in the Engadine—we felt con-

vinced we could have endured none of the other hotels that stood broiling and basking in the intense south sun the whole day long. The Kurhaus, stretching across the valley, receives the morning and afternoon winds, and seated in our covered balcony, we used to think it almost cool and pleasant when other people were expiring with the heat. From our balcony we overlooked the grounds and the orchestra, where, however, the band never played. To the right were the baths —a long low building with a covered way into the hotel; and beyond the baths was the pump-room, where people drank the waters. To the left, at some little distance, ran the river. All about us were the



ST. MORITZ. HOTEL VICTORIA.

mountain slopes covered with their forests of pines, and the far-off mountain tops, where snow never quite disappears.

At the other end of the grounds a new hotel reared its aggressive head; the only hotel that faces the same way as the Kurhaus; but it is less pleasantly situated. Just beyond it stretches the one long street of small wooden houses or bungalows leading towards St. Moritz Dorf, and forming the shops of the place, where everything is sold. It had the air of a cheap second rate bazaar, that grated strangely upon one and added to one's dislike of St. Moritz. This element was fortunately invisible from our balcony.

To the left of us was the "dépendance" of the hotel: a small pleasant house: and one day there was great commotion. People were running in and out, furniture was being taken, the manager was

very much on the scene, there was a feeling as of flags fluttering; evidently something unusual was in the air; everyone was excited. This was due to the arrival of the Grand Duke of Baden, who had taken the villa for a month.

He came one afternoon very quietly with the Grand Duchess and their suite: whilst Prince Max and his mother had rooms in the hotel. Every day they all met and dined and took supper in the public restaurant, quietly, without any state or ceremony, whilst their ladies and gentlemen in waiting sat at a table some distance away. Prince Max at that time was not engaged to be married, and therefore was a much more interesting personage to the belles of St. Moritz than he became a few months afterwards, when his engagement was announced to the world—and since cancelled. Not that it could make the smallest possible difference to the belles from a matrimonial point of view: but there is a sentiment in these things; and Prince Max fancy free and Prince Max appropriated, with eyes and fancy for only one face in the world—yes, it made all the difference. He was tall and slender, and very pleasant-looking and very affable, exactly the face and form that many a susceptible and romantic girl would fall down and worship—at a distance. But that very distance lent enchantment. No fruits are so sweet as forbidden fruits, and nothing is so ardently desired as the unattainable.

When the Grand Duke arrived St. Moritz was getting very full, but still there were very few English in the place: less last year than had been known for many years. The large new dining-room at the Kurhaus had gradually filled up all its tables. We had been amongst the first to arrive and the comparative quiet that reigned was very pleasant; but day after day it increased until it rose to a confused and confusing babel. This was, however, nothing to the uproar that went on after supper in the halls, where people sat and drank coffee, and laughed and talked as only foreigners can laugh and talk; the more noise the more enjoyment. It often became unbearable, and the quiet and retirement of the distant reading-room was like Paradise after Pandemonium.

But there were nights when even the reading-room was invaded by sound. The ball-room was just beyond it, and sometimes there were dances and sometimes there were concerts. The latter were very enjoyable. The orchestra played really well, and on those occasions confined itself chiefly to good classical music. This perhaps was the reason that they were very thinly attended. The halls would be almost as full as ever, echoing to the laughter of the chattering crowd; but in the concert-room the empty seats—row after row—were painfully evident. The orchestra, however, played their very best, satisfied with the appreciation of the few. The dances were more popular, and people would assemble from the different hotels, but the nicest people and careful mothers invariably kept away.

For the Germans, life at the Kurhaus was no doubt very pleasant; they were in their element. Our friend Herr von D. was an exception to the general rule, but then he belonged to a rank of life that is not aggressive and does not cultivate loud tones. He joined us on first arriving, and we shared the same table in the dining-room, and our afternoon walks were invariably taken together.

Those afternoons were the pleasantest part of our stay in St. Moritz. There were numerous walks, at the end of which came the goal, where we found rest and coffee. These walks for the most part led through woods, finally opening out into the broad mountain slopes, where cattle grazed and where the air was certainly very soft and soothing. It was often intensely hot, and the shade of the woods

ST. MORITZ, DORF. ¹

where the sun glinted through the fir trees and chequered our path with flickering lights and shadows, was intensely grateful. Benches here and there on the way enabled one to rest in the ever upward climb, and follow the dancing sunlight, and listen to the humming of the flies, and now and then the chirp of a solitary bird, which alone broke the intense silence, and watch the graceful squirrels leaping from bough to bough. We almost always had it to ourselves, for the coffee-excursions were numerous, and the places that were the great favourites with the people were not our favourites. Most of the visitors loved to flock together, but we preferred repose.

We kept very much to three walks: the Ober Alpina, the Unter Alpina, and the Crestalta.

The latter led by the side of the river and through a charming wood, in which one could still hear and see the stream, until reaching a small hill covered with pine trees, we had to make a steep climb to the top. Here was the restaurant, which had once been an old monastery, or so tradition said; a square building round which the coffee-tables were placed.

The view was magnificent. Down below ran the river Inn, shallow and winding and beautiful. On the opposite slopes stood Campfer, with its cluster of houses rising above each other. Many English come to Campfer in preference to St. Moritz, preferring the quieter and more simple life, and, possibly, the reduced scale of charges. An omnibus takes the patients to the baths and waters.

To the left the view opened out. In the valley the lakes of Silvaplana and Silz Maria reflected the blue sky and the pine trees, the villages themselves looking a mere handful of houses sleeping in the plain. The Engadine stretches far away towards Maloja, the great snow mountains towering upwards: the Piz d'Arpiglia, the Piz Macun, the mountains above Zernets in the Lower Engadine, and to the left, the massive Bernina range: a rare and splendid panorama.

One day, before reaching the Crestalta, we took a boat by the lake side. Our boatman was Italian and spent his winters at the Italian lakes. He talked Italian, and also the Romansch language of the Engadine, the latter being to us so much Greek. He was a tall, dark man, very handsome, and handled the oars with amazing strength and skill. Also, he had all the gallantry of the Italian: was particularly solicitous for the lady's comfort and welfare, arranged the awning so that no sun should reach her, and would have given her all the cushions if we had not objected to absolutely bare boards.

Herr von D. who always went about with a white umbrella—a very sensible precaution we English neglect too much and suffer in consequence—found that here he might furl his sunshade: the awning was large and there was room enough and to spare.

It was a delightful row through the lake's calm waters. The sun flashes were almost dazzling, the reflections vivid. Muretti, our boatman, seemed to make the boat fly through the water, until we begged him to make less speed that we might enjoy it the more. Silvaplana was soon left behind, and the Crestalta rose up boldly on the edge of the water, where it found its reflection. All about us were the pine-covered hills, and falling away beyond them the great snow mountains upreared their heads. Sleeping in the plain, but at some distance, was Silz Maria, object of our pilgrimage.

Our boatman was communicative, and Herr von D. could talk to him both in Italian and Romansch; for he was a linguist and fond of philology.

"I come here every summer," said Muretti, giving us an epitome of his life; "and every summer I think shall be my last; but I shall

probably continue to come for many a long year, for I know no place that is better. It is a far journey from Italy, but then I have my boat here, and if I sold it I should only get half price for it."

"But surely you do very well?" said von D. "St. Moritz is much frequented, and you have also Campfer and Silvaplana to fall back upon."

Muretti shrugged his shoulders. Like so many of his countrymen—and men of other countries for that matter—he could only be content with a little more than he had, though he might be gaining an excellent living. He had large, dark dreamy eyes, well-cut features,



ST. MORITZ LAKE. ON THE WAY FROM THE OBER ALPINA.

black, crisp curly hair, and a head well set upon his shoulders—the shoulders shrugged in a certain dissatisfaction.

"I gain less than you would think for, signore. And this year less than ever. The season has begun badly for me. You are the only patrons I have had since the day before yesterday. It is weary work waiting for those who do not come."

"Say rather the season has not begun at all yet," returned von D. "Another week and you will see a great difference. You will have people fighting for your boat, bespeaking it a week beforehand."

Muretti's white teeth—they were very white and even: Nature had certainly made a sort of Adonis of him—his white teeth gleamed and his dark eyes flashed with pleasure.

"I hope the signor is a true prophet," he said ; "but all the same my boat is not the favourite excursion here. People seem to prefer walking. They like to make up little parties, and stroll through the woods, where they can laugh and joke and race about ; and at the end find their restaurant and their coffee. This splendid row on the water—where at least they can be cool and have only to sit still and enjoy it—the villages of Silvaplana and Silz Maria—no, all that is too quiet for them. And so I never have as much work as I should like."

"But at least you pay your way ?" said von D., sympathetically, though he saw that the man was of those who never know that a contented mind is a continual feast.

"Oh, yes, I do that," acknowledged the man ; "and thanks to the saints, I have always been able to send a weekly sum to the wife. So far I have had to ask a favour of no man. Yes, that is gratifying when you come to think of it."

"Very well, then ; learn to be content. So you have a wife in Italy ?"

"Si, signore ; and two as fine children as you would meet in a day's march. They are eight and ten years old, now."

"Why don't you bring them with you ?"

Muretti rested on his oars a moment, sheerly aghast at the suggestion.

"The expense of the journey ! I should be ruined !" he cried. "The signor is surely not in earnest ? Besides which," he added in strict candour, "though I am very fond of the wife and do my best for her, and we are on very good terms, yet I confess that I do enjoy my summer's freedom up here. The best regulated household is nothing but a worry. If it's not this, it's that ; if it's not that, it's something else. One year the wife did propose it, but I shut her up so sharply that she never proposed it again. One must be master sometimes, and make them feel that they must take what is given them, and be thankful."

Muretti had evidently no idea of "doing honour unto the weaker vessel ;" but there was nothing of the tyrant or the savage about him, and his wife had probably very little to complain of.

"And after all," he said, tossing his fine head backward and pulling a long stroke, as though summing up the whole situation, "the season here is short enough ; I have barely three months' liberty, and so spend most of my time at home. Very hard if I could not have this time of peace and quietness. I earn the bread, I keep the house going—and I look upon these three months as my recreation and reward. Yet I am working all the time."

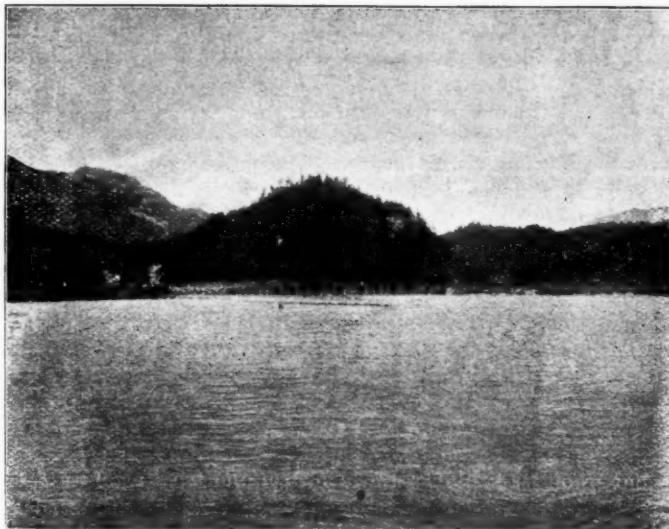
No doubt if Muretti's sentiments were put to the vote he would have a good many followers. He certainly was carrying out his profession at the present moment, for in spite of desiring him to reduce his efforts, the boat—by no means a small one—under his

strong hands shot through the lake like an arrow. The cool ripple and gurgle of the water was a very pleasant sound, for the sun was pouring down upon the awning very much like a fiery furnace.

"A question whether it improves the situation," said von D. "Outside we are fried, inside we are baked. Is it better to be fried or baked?"

"If you throw a lady's complexion into the scale, I think the awning will gain the vote," laughed E. "I should not like to return to England tanned and freckled, or the colour of a milkmaid."

Von D. bowed. "Nothing could injure your complexion," he said gallantly.



CRESTALTA.

"That is Gladstonian," retorted E., "capable of two interpretations."

"Not when the meaning is so obvious," said von D. And the near approach of the journey's end put a truce to compliments.

It had passed too rapidly. Campfer on its slopes was far off; Crestalta had become quite distant, and looked like a veritable romantic mediæval castle outlined against the blue sky. Silvaplana lying in the meadows between the lakes looked quite dreamlike, its splendid larch and pine woods—the *Pinus cembra* found also in the Carpathians and in Siberia—rising in the background. In front of us was the Julier road we had come down on first arriving, looking on to the massive Bernina mountain with its eternal snows and

glaciers. And then we passed into shallow water and shot up to the flat shore and the landing place.

But we had by no means reached our destination : Silz Maria lay some distance off in the plain, and a point of wooded land stretching out hid it completely from one's view. Muretti undertook to bide our time, and turning to the left we passed in blind faith into the wood. There was a choice of paths and of course we took the wrong one, which caused us to climb up a steep height and then down again at the risk of life and limbs, until we thought the walk would never end.

Nevertheless it was very pleasant. In the deep shade it was comparatively cool, the sun here and there glinting through the trees in patches of light, our way strewn with green mosses, ferns and wild flowers ; and Herr von D., who was a botanist, exchanged notes with E. and gathered many a rare specimen only found in the Alpine districts. The solitude, the utter silence, broken only by our own voices and laughter, were not the least charm of the walk. But like everything else it came to an end, and a successful end ; we were not doomed to an eternal pilgrimage, like the Wandering Jew ; for suddenly, in a break in the trees, sleeping in the plain, we saw the white houses and church steeple of Silz Maria ; a great white cameo in a green setting of meadowland.

We climbed down the wooded slopes, and soon found ourselves in the quiet, deserted village. It seemed absolutely abandoned ; not a soul was visible, not a sound was heard other than the flow of the river making its gentle way towards St. Moritz. It is considered the prettiest village in the Engadine, and lies at the foot of the Piz Corvatsch, surrounded by wooded slopes through which the river winds like a silver thread. Opposite, above these wooded slopes, rise the rocky peaks of Piz Langrev, sharply outlined against the sky.

The village is a small one, pure and simple ; a straggling collection of chalets, with their gabled roofs and small balconies. Yet it boasts two hotels that look quite large and important beside the chalets, which, like the violets, seem endeavouring to hide their lowly heads.

The hotels bear the romantic names of Edelweiss and Alpenrose. Here people come and spend quiet weeks of rest : a calm contentment, where they may feel very far removed from the world and its storms. But they must be people of internal resources, or time would hang heavily upon their hands. Heaven provides an abundance of physical charm, they must come armed with their own mental sunshine. There is absolutely nothing to do in Silz Maria, walks and excursions excepted.

At one of the hotels—we really forget whether it was the Alpenrose or the Edelweiss, and it matters little—we roused them after considerable searching and summoning, and persuaded them to bring us coffee at one of the deserted tables in the open air.

The coffee was excellent and very grateful after our late labours ;

seemed to stimulate the nerves and rouse the imagination, and heighten all the beauty and charm of the surrounding scenery. We felt in a small paradise. Not that this or any part of the Engadine has the majestic grandeur of central Switzerland, or can in the least degree approach it; but the extreme prettiness and even beauty of Silz Maria is undoubted, and is far superior to St. Moritz. In point of charm we should place St. Moritz almost at the bottom of the list.

"If we were adventurously inclined," said von D. stimulated by the coffee, "we should now start for the Fex Glacier. It is only about five miles away, and the walk from beginning to end is charming."

"With a great deal of climbing, no doubt?"



AT THE OBER A: PINA.

"*Natürlich*; but that is good exercise."

E. looked horrified, taking the suggestion *au pied de la lettre*.

"If you gentlemen like to go in for martyrdom, pray do so," she observed. "You might as well ask me to go to the moon as to the Fex Glacier; I should as soon reach the one as the other. But I am quite willing to remain here until your return. In this deserted village I shall be quite safe. The people of the inn will bring me out a light collation when hunger overtakes me. The hours will pass only too quickly. One could never be dull in such a scene: and I will occupy myself in thinking over some of the points in the life of Elizabeth of Bohemia, which I mean to write. There will be a ghostly chapter," she added, lowering her voice to a mysterious

whisper, and making her eyes very large and round, the more to impress us ; "but that can only be written after our next visit to Heidelberg, and my midnight interview with Elizabeth's ghost. I am persuaded it appears—and that she will appear to me."

"Shall you not be nervous at meeting a ghost—too nervous to talk to it ?" asked Herr von D., smiling.

"Ah ! you are incredulous !" cried E., very sensitive upon the point. "I see it in your expression. You do not believe in ghosts. Now Dr. Johnson—"

"Oh, but that is an old opinion," we interrupted, "and quoted *ad nauseam*."

"It is probably new to Herr von D.," returned E., "and no opinion of Dr. Johnson's can be quoted too often—on such a subject." Upon which she proceeded to give von D. the benefit of Dr. Johnson's well-known remark.

"But I am not so incredulous as you suppose," said von D. "Have you read that last book about ghosts ? It is very remarkable, and if I am not convinced, it is because I have myself never seen a ghost. They say in your language that seeing is believing, and when I see a ghost I will believe : not until then. On the other hand I do not disbelieve—I leave it an open question. One must not be narrow-minded or lay down too positive opinions."

"A most becoming frame of mind," laughed E. ; "and you are on the very brink of conversion. After my interview with the ghost of Elizabeth, you will be quite convinced. No ; I shall not be at all nervous. For what reason ? No one ever heard of a ghost running away with anyone, or committing a murder ; and certainly the ghost of the gentle Elizabeth would be the very last to do harm. She suffered too much herself in this life to bring suffering to others. But if you are going to your Fex Glacier, the sooner you start the better."

Herr von D. consulted his watch.

"On the whole, I think we will defer the expedition," he said comically. "We might lose our way, or stumble and sprain a foot, to which would be added our agonies of remorse at having left you here. No ; we will return to our boatman, whose patience would probably not be equal to yours. We should find he had disappeared and gone back to Campfer. A walk of six miles from here to the Kurhaus would tax your powers as much as the excursion to the Fex Glacier."

"I should die on the way," laughed E. "And my interview with Elizabeth's ghost would never take place ; and you would never be converted ; and the Life would never be written. All this is too terrible to contemplate—let us hasten back to our boatman—whose duty towards his wife, by the way, is by no means orthodox."

So we paid our bill and rewarded our waiter, who put us in the right road for returning.

We found Muretti sitting on the shore, gazing at the sky, and patiently waiting. He would probably have so waited till midnight, with the confidence these men repose in those who hire them.

A midnight row across the lake under the midnight stars would have been very delightful: the mountains in the darkness gigantic and portentous, the trees clothed in mysterious silence, nothing to break the stillness of the air but the rhythmical plashing of the oars. But we were content to return in broad daylight, though the sun was declining and casting long and lovely shadows through the trees as we went through the woods. Muretti rowed more leisurely in returning, as though realising that his day's work would be over at his journey's end, and he was not at all anxious for that end



SAMADEN.

to come. He even seemed to wish to prolong the time, for on passing Silvaplana, he asked if we would not land and walk through the village, and take a rest at the Post, where he had been told the sparkling Asti was excellent: he would willingly wait an hour or two and make no extra charge. Not that he knew very much about sparkling Asti, which he took only on high days and holidays.

Muretti was evidently not in favour of the blue ribbon. He was also cunning in his argument—sparkling Asti on a very hot day, and after a good deal of exertion, was very tempting, refreshing coffee notwithstanding. And really there was much to admire in the man; he was no mere "time-server," bargaining for so many hours, and dropping work at the first stroke of the clock.

But we would not be bribed to-day. E.'s powers were limited—she could no more.

So we left Silvaplana unmolested, sleeping in the meadows and on the slope, with its lakes to right and left. It looked deliciously restful, and we almost longed to penetrate into those larch woods, and tread the mossy carpet, and add to our stock of specimens—the Alpine flora found in high latitudes: not good to eat, like the rare *multeberg* in the high latitudes of Norway, but beautiful to look at: appealing not to the sensual but the spiritual. We let it all go by; and the excellent sparkling Asti of the Post remained in the cellars for a future opportunity; and the romantic Crestalta loomed ever high and



ON THE WAY TO MALOJA.

higher as we drew near, its marvellous reflections thrown upon the clear waters.

Then where the land rounded into a crescent we approached the shore, and Muretti gave a last long vigorous pull and shipped his oars, and the boat shot like an arrow straight on to the beach, and came, with the rustle of sand and shingle, to an anchor.

We bade our boatman farewell, rewarded him for his disinterestedness, and wished him a successful season. Being an Italian, he naturally had his gallant speech at hand.

"If all my patrons were as the signori, I should be a happy and contented man," he said. "Never should I dream of changing my summer quarters, for after all I like the place, and at Campfer they make me very comfortable at small charge. I will drink the

health of the signori to-night, but it will be in plain beer—not in sparkling Asti."

He bared his head and made us all a low bow; then shoved his boat off and pulled manfully for the opposite shore. Again the boat flew like an arrow through the water, and before long he had reached his moorings. We watched him secure his boat, put everything shipshape, and then take his leisurely way up the hill.

Once he turned, and seeing the three figures where he had left them—they were admiring the whole scene rather than watching his movements—he took off his cap, and made another farewell bow. We could just discern the action, for the distance between us was



SAMADEN.

now too great for identification. Evidently there was good in Muretti; he possessed the rare merit of being grateful, a virtue that cannot shine alone.

It was a delicious walk back to the Kurhaus by the riverside, in the cool of the evening, and we arrived just in time for supper.

After the repose of the lake, the calm and quiet and desertion of Silz Maria, the babel of the dining-room seemed louder than ever. Everyone was worked up into a state of excitement, and notes were compared, and the day's adventures and excursions were discussed with that boisterous energy, without which the Germans would expire. Herr von D. disliked the babel as much as we did, but, as we have said, he belonged to a different rank in life from most of those present.

Some of them were indeed singular in appearance, and many of the costumes worn by the ladies would have puzzled the inventive powers of a magician. The Germans—they were nearly all German—have proverbially bad taste in dress, appearing with any number of acute angles, and with no sense of harmony of colours. It runs through their life. They cannot even arrange their flowers without ruining the whole effect of what should be graceful and lovely.

But, as we have said, the real uproar began when everyone congregated in the halls after supper, and sat round the small tables taking their coffee and cognac and liqueurs, and the incense of tobacco filled the air. It would wax louder and louder until it grew almost riotous, and one could only wonder at human nature that loved to have it so: not only the young and foolish, but staid men and women who had reached their meridian or passed it, and were a good way downhill. They were all alike and all loved noise.

We would sit for awhile in the ante-room—only divided by pillars from the great central hall—a quiet party of three, quietly talking, and half guessing at what we said to each other; or listening to the band—it was a string band—that nightly played in a recess not far from us.

We wondered why it played, for no one seemed to listen. Very often all sound of music was drowned by the voices. It was Pandemonium broken loose. The poor musicians, we thought, might just as well have had their evenings to themselves after the day's labours. But every night the orchestra divided itself into three parts, and played at the three chief hotels of the Bad; excepting on those nights when they rallied their forces and gave a grand concert in the concert-room, and then they only played for an hour in the hall.

The *Kulm* at the Dorf was proudly independent, and had its own private and special orchestra. There it was always May: and they could have their dances and concerts every night if it pleased them. The hotel was capable of holding a great crowd; all were English and American; and we wondered how far their Pandemonium fell short of that at the Kurhaus.

After a storm, a calm. We would retire to the comfortable and deserted reading-room, and digest the news of the world; and presently E. would ask to be escorted to her room; and as we passed on the fringe of the crowd and the uproar waxed louder and louder still, one might almost be forgiven for wishing to be a little "hard of hearing." The lift boy was always at his post, in close proximity to the babel; and it was very evident by the expression of his face—the open mouth and delighted eyes—that he was in paradise.

The short excursion of the lift over, and E. safe in her dominions, we would return, and joining von D. stroll out into the quiet night under the stars, whilst he narrated to us political experiences

and social adventures—many of them events in the lives of men who had swayed empires—handed down to him from his father. That quiet stroll in the fresh night air, under the dark skies, was not the least pleasant hour of the day.

More frequent and very favourite walks were those to the Ober and Unter Alpina. The way, after crossing the river, led always upwards through the lonely but very lovely paths of the wood. We very seldom met anyone, excepting a lady accompanied by four dogs of the long-haired terrier species, and a maid who always walked behind the mistress at the exact distance of ten yards, never more or less. If the mistress stopped, the maid stopped, and



OUR FRIENDLY COW—TAKEN AT A DISADVANTAGE.

when the one set out again, the other did likewise. They might have been two pieces of machinery wound up to perform certain evolutions.

The dogs were Herr von D.'s aversion, the lady was ours. She was distinctly peculiar: very masculine, and delighting in masculine attire, redeemed only by a skirt. This skirt, however, was hooked up far above the ankles, and disclosed how firmly she planted her large feet upon the ground in walking. In her hand she carried an alpen-stock, and with every footstep she prodded the ground. Her face was severe; not a muscle of it ever moved; her head never turned to right or left; she never stopped to address a word to her maid. It seemed that she must be undergoing a penance; was under a

vow to walk a certain daily distance; and that for her, like the Wandering Jew, there was no rest and no cessation.

Once we thought we would politely accost her and ask her a question, just to find out whether she was human, or, like the Flying Dutchman on the waters, not to be approached. But as we drew near, the stern relentless expression, the eyes gazing straight before her to unseen depths beyond the woods, the firm planting of the footsteps that never turned aside and never hesitated—when we noted this, our courage evaporated.

As we passed we might have been phantoms for any sign she gave that she was conscious of our presence. We moved aside to let her go by, and if we had not done so, it was evident that she would have walked through us. She was as one who walked in sleep, yet evidently was no somnambulist; and she was too substantial to be an astral body in search of its human tenement.

The maid who followed with such rigid regularity was slightly more feminine, but evidently had fallen into a mechanical way of doing things which needed little or no exercise of reason. On her arm she invariably carried a small basket, and if these two automatons ever needed anything so gross as luncheon, and if they had the power of arresting those flying footsteps, the basket was evidently a receptacle for their daily light refreshment.

It was astonishing how often we met this strange apparition, how seldom anyone else crossed our path. As a rule we had the woods entirely to ourselves. The shade and silence, coolness and repose were delightful. Von D. would furl his white umbrella, and search for specimens of wild flowers, and it was wonderful what treasures he brought out of hidden nooks.

"But I am an old habitué," he would laughingly say, "and know exactly where they love to grow."

The wood came to an end before reaching the Ober Alpina. On arriving there we found ourselves in the midst of wide undulating lands, stretching away into hills that apparently would take days to traverse; a great tract of country suggestive of infinitude. As a rule there was not a creature to be seen in all the far-reaching undulations. A few pedestrians would come to the restaurant, and sit on the terrace, overlooking the splendid view: a deep valley stretching downwards by steep degrees, the way rough with great stones and boulders, moss grown and beautiful. The slopes on either side were thickly wooded, and far down at the end of the view, reposed St. Moritz.

Our own favourite spot was not the terrace, which was generally invaded, but the side of a detached shed, where we found the solitude we loved, and where the serving-woman brought us a table and chairs.

It was in full view of the lovely green, meadowy land, the far-reaching undulations that were so delightful to contemplate, whilst

here and there a few heads of brown cattle added life and colour to the scene. One cow in particular grew to know us, would come to E.'s call, graciously submit to be petted and fed with sugar, and ended by being exceedingly friendly.

Whilst we waited for coffee, Herr von D. would furl his umbrella and borrow E.'s parasol, declaring it was smaller and less in the way.

Here we spent many an afternoon; hours full of quiet charm and repose, in which nature seemed to take us into her confidence, and display for us all her attractions.

One afternoon the woman placed our chairs and table in great excitement.



CELERINA.

"Would you believe," she said, "the lady of the dogs has actually been to the restaurant. The scores of times she has passed and taken no more notice of us than if we were a cowshed or a fever hospital. But to-day she could not help herself. She was suddenly taken ill, and her servant had forgotten to put the flask in her basket. It seems there is something a little wrong with the heart. 'No wonder, madame,' I said, 'the way you walk. It seems to me that you never stop. Enough to wear out ten hearts, and we have only one apiece.' With that I handed her a good draught of cognac and she drank it down without even a grimace and felt better. 'Silence, impudent woman,' she said—fancy calling me impudent with no more ceremony than if it was my own servant—'Silence,

woman, and don't be so free with your opinions. If you try to legislate for other people and set the world to rights, you will only make enemies all round. Your cognac is good, but you are a foolish, meddlesome creature.' All this time, her servant stood about a yard away, stiff and upright and silent, expecting, no doubt, a good scolding for forgetting the flask. The lady had a voice quite like a man's, and seemed very determined. As soon as she was all right again, away she went with her alpenstock, striding like a giant. This was quite early this morning, and they went over the hill and disappeared—across there"—pointing to the far off undulations so suggestive of infinitude. "And I verily believe"—shading her eyes with her hand—"yes, I do declare, there they are coming back again! Six hours since they were here, and I'll be bound have never ceased walking the whole time!"

The woman's eyes were keen. On the brow of the slope we could just discern two black marks that might be human figures. They evidently moved, and as they approached, proved to be the lady of the dogs, her maid following at the regulation distance of ten yards. As usual she looked neither to right nor left, but strided manfully on her way.

"Not so much as a glance of gratitude for my good cognac," said the woman, who happened to be bringing us a relay of warm coffee. "About here she is called the Wandering Jewess: and though she is no Jewess, it describes her very well. I am told she is as rich as she is eccentric, and has a magnificent suite of rooms at the Hotel Victoria. And the only time her servant spoke to her, she called her *Frau Gräfin*. What a strange way of passing one's life."

On the third afternoon after this, when again at the Ober Alpina, interviewing the friendly cow, and contemplating the slopes of infinitude, we were suddenly overtaken by a thunderstorm; in that solitude, that wide tract of country, a solemn and magnificent sight. The dense lowering clouds were black as ink, a darkness almost of night enveloped us; the thunder rolled and crashed about the hills and echoed through the valley with a sound majestic and almost appalling. The lightning ran along the ground and played about the trees and illumined the whole sky with its zigzag flashes, following each other with momentary rapidity. The rain came down in hissing torrents. It was one of the finest and grandest storms we had ever seen.

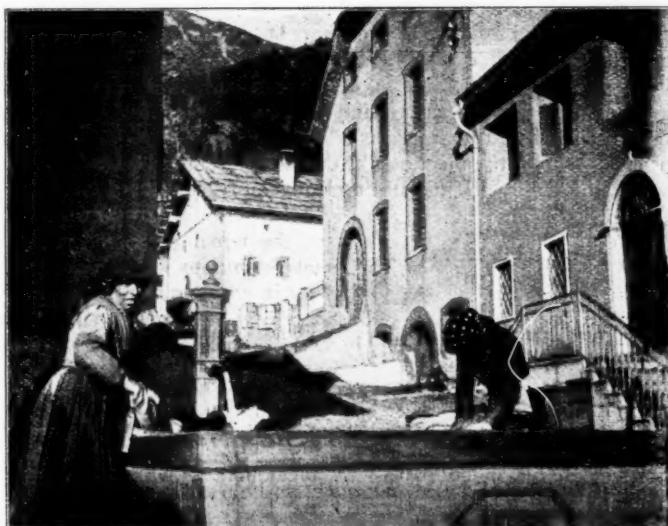
The thunderclaps seemed to shake the little restaurant to its very foundations, and with every flash we wondered whether the house was doomed. The woman crossed herself frequently—she was a Roman Catholic and not a true Engadiner—and looked terrified.

"Whenever a storm comes I think my last hour has come with it," she said. "And I always imagine my house will be struck. There is no protection—no conductor; it would burn like tinder. Five minutes and all would be over, and I should be houseless and home-

less.—Santa Maria!" as a more vivid flash lighted up the sky, and a yet louder peal broke overhead and went crashing down the ravine, "but this is awful. Never have I heard anything like it."

We were looking out of the window at the moment, and not a hundred yards off saw a tree absolutely rent asunder by a blinding flash. Had it struck the little house instead, we should probably all have formed part of a heap of ruins.

It was a storm short and sharp. At the end of an hour all was over; the dark clouds rolled away, the sky was again clear and blue, the sun seemed hotter and more brilliant than ever. It reminded us very much of a storm we had encountered at La Camargue in the Valley of the Rhône.



PONTRESINA.

And here, fortunately, the paths dried up quickly, so that the storm did not interfere with our return walk. We even prolonged it, and went an extended round through the woods. The path was high up, and overlooked the long valley, with its fine view. St. Moritz we saw stretching across the plain, the green transparent lake beyond, into which the river runs; on the opposite shore the Waldhaus restaurant, favourite excursion of the German element, and crowded every afternoon. To us, the quiet charms and repose of the Alpina were a thousandfold greater. We finally came out at St. Moritz Dorf, and down the hot white road passed the little English church, which stands so well on the hill slope between the Dorf and the Bad. The first two Sundays the service was admirably and impressively

performed ; the congregation was a mere handful. After that it increased, and the choir seats were filled with volunteers who in no way added to the harmony and reverence of the Liturgy.

One day we varied our afternoon excursion by a drive to Pontresina. The day as usual was magnificent. We started immediately after dinner, following the carriage of the Grand Duke, who, however, was only returning to his villa. Our road lay through St. Moritz Dorf, and it was quite pleasant to feel that we were turning our backs upon scenes that had grown monotonous and wearisome, and the bungalow shops that looked so much like a second-rate bazaar ; all the well-known points which we had never grown to love or even tolerate. All this was left behind for a whole long afternoon ; and we faced new scenes with something of the feeling of a schoolboy who has been given an unexpected half-holiday.

New scenes to us ; but to Herr von D., who was an old habitué of St. Moritz, every foot, every turn of the road was familiar ground.

Leaving the Dorf behind us, crowded by its huge Hotel Kulm, we descended the wooded zigzag, and looked upwards through the trees upon the peaks and undulations of the snow-crowned mountains, and downwards upon the meadows in the valley, gemmed with their wild-flowers, through which the Inn took its course, a small silvery stream flashing in the sunlight.

Once on a level with the meadows, the remainder of the way was almost smooth as a plain. The great mountains were all about us ; the beauty of the scene was already far in advance of St. Moritz.

Before long we reached Celerina, a very picturesque village lying sheltered by the mountains : quite a large village and important as one of the chief places in the Engadine for confections, which it sends into all parts of the world. Many of the confectioners, too, that one sees in England, serving behind counters in white aprons and paper caps, come from Celerina : and having made a small fortune amongst us, go back to their home, to build themselves a picturesque white house with gabled roofs, and pass the remainder of their days *en petits seigneurs* : shining lights to their neighbours by reason of their riches and knowledge of the world. For having travelled beyond seas it follows that they must have widened their experiences and enlarged their views.

Certainly a prettier spot than Celerina need not be wished for ; and those who leave it to go out into the world must leave their heart behind them. Every pound they add to their hoard represents so many hours towards emancipation. They are slaves to necessity these Swiss toilers in foreign countries : and if their shackles are moral and not physical, they are none the less binding.

Cresta, another but smaller settlement, adjoins Celerina. A small stream runs between the villages, the Schlatteinbach, adding much to the brightness of the road.

After this, the valley broadens to a plain, the road to the right

leading to Pontresina, that to the left to Samaden, which we see a mile and a half away, lying in what looks like intense solitude and repose on a gentle slope facing the South. Perhaps the situation is not very healthy, for close to it is a broad marshy plain, through which the river runs.

From here, it looks a mere handful of houses, but it is the chief village or town of the Engadine, and the wealthiest. It is surrounded by large tracts of forests, and every inhabitant, Swiss or foreign, is entitled to a certain quantity of wood at reduced prices. This quantity is supposed to represent nine cubic metres: the price paid is about a quarter of the market value; and the money thus obtained is devoted by the Communal Forestry Fund for planting



ON THE WAY TO PONTRESINA. PIZ BERNINA IN THE BACKGROUND.

new trees. Any householder selling his share of wood is liable to punishment.

The height of Samaden is about 5,660 feet; the native population averages 1,000: and the religion is Protestant, following the tenets of Zwingli—as in nearly all the surrounding neighbourhood.

One of the chief objects of interest in Samaden is a curious old house that once belonged to the family of de Salis, but is now owned by the de Plantas. These families were the most important in this part of the world, and there seems to have been a certain rivalry between them, like the feuds of the Guelphs and Ghibelins on a small scale. Far up the slope of one of the hills one catches sight

of a white farm-house surrounded by its setting of fir trees, in which one longs to take up quarters for a time "far from the madding crowd." This also belongs to the de Plantas.

But still more the object of one's ambition was the little house or shanty on the very crest of the mountain, where coffee and rolls may be had throughout the summer by sturdy climbers who are willing to place a restraint upon their hunger for the sake of a magnificent view, a wonderful sunrise or sunset.

We rolled over the iron bridge which led to Pontresina and the famous Bernina Pass—a very remarkable drive. Close to the Pass is the Bernina Hospice; once a refuge of the roughest description for benighted travellers, but now frequented and found comfortable by those who feel the air of the Engadine too relaxing. Within five minutes of the Hospice comes the bleak Pass, near the summit of which is an old lead mine said to have been worked as far back as the year 1200.

Not far from the iron bridge over which we rolled, was a ruined castle on a wooded height, and tradition has it that in the fifth century it was inhabited by a lawless bandit who waylaid merchants on their way from the Bernina Pass to the Engadine, exacting black-mail. Far and near he was the terror of the neighbourhood, so strong that none dare attack him, so cunning that he could never be captured.

But one day he grew too bold and went too far in his depredations: cast his covetous eyes upon the loveliest maiden in Pontresina, a small village then existing: caught her and carried her away to his mountain fastness.

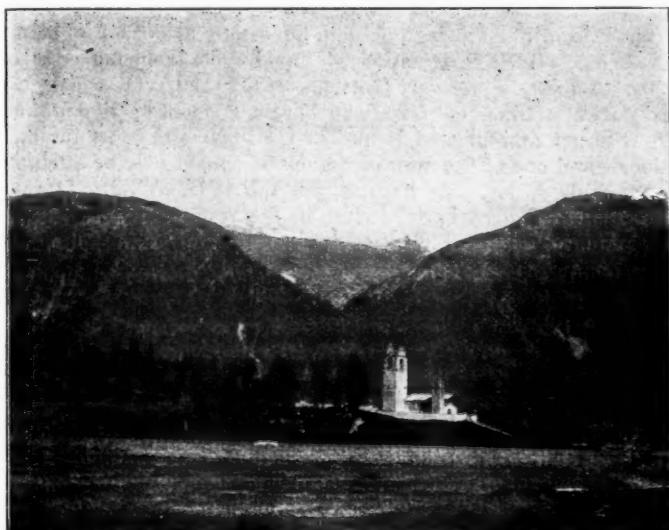
This beautiful girl was engaged to be married, which made the abduction still more cruel. Her lover, desperate and determined upon vengeance, organised a band of men and attacked the castle, which surrendered; the Flower of Pontresina was rescued, and the marriage was subsequently celebrated with great rejoicings. The wonder is that they did not put the ruffian to death, but merely banished him from the valley.

We lost sight of Samaden, and went our way up the splendid valley. In front of us was the snow-capped Bernina range, standing out in strong contrast with the blue sky. On each side of us the towering mountains, magnificently wooded. To our right flowed the beautiful stream or torrent of the Flatzbach, which has its origin in the Morteratsch glacier and Lake Nero, near the Bernina Hospice. In those high latitudes it is called the Berninabach, and changes its name on being joined by the Roseg river.

Pontresina, looking south, faces the Roseg valley, at the head of which may be seen the small Roseg glacier. It is one of the loveliest streams in this part of the country, now narrowing to a mountain torrent and rushing fiercely between precipitous rocks that almost meet, now broadening into a shallow stream, frothing over its

shallow bed, running with cool, refreshing sound, flashing in the sunlight.

Up this splendid valley we made our way, until, where the valley narrowed, we came to Pontresina: a very different place now from the Pontresina from which the fair maiden was stolen by the bandit of the wooded heights of Chastlatsch. It lies in a narrow defile, and so far we thought it disagreeably situated: cramped and squeezed into its limited area, the mountains seeming to weigh down upon it. Of the two situations we preferred St. Moritz. Yet Pontresina is fashionable and much frequented. To-day it resembles a village in which some large overgrown hotels have planted themselves down, over-



OLD CHURCH ON THE WAY TO PONTRESINA.

shadowing the smaller houses with their modest gables; houses that were there ages before the large hotels were thought of.

The place consists of one long, straggling street, through which we passed quickly. Diligences were at some of the hotels, with their usual bustle and confusion; in a square nook off the road, women were washing linen. We are bound to say they were not beautiful women, but there is nearly always something interesting about women washing at a roadside fountain. Certain things always carry about with them a feeling of the picturesque—such as a blacksmith's forge, which also adds a weird, barbaric element to its charm.

We passed quickly away from all this to where immediately behind the village, the valley widens again, and reached the end of our drive

at the restaurant which lies almost at the foot of the Morteratsch glacier. Here horse and driver put up, and we began to ascend the hill at the back of the inn: a steep but charming climb, through wooded paths where the Alpenrose grew in abundance.

From the summit the view was magnificent. In front of us stretched the splendid glacier, white snow and blue ice, the cracks and fissures distinctly traced. Easy to trace were the tracks made by the pilgrims; and as we looked small parties of them were moving slowly upwards and downwards over the dead white surface. Rising beyond the glacier were splendid peaks: the Morteratsch, Bernina, Crast' Agüzza, Zuppo, some of them 13,000 feet high.

The Morteratsch glacier is an easy and interesting excursion, requiring only the most ordinary care. To-day we are contented to see it from a distance, and were so near that with the help of glasses and a little imagination we could quite fancy ourselves one of the climbers, whose very footsteps we followed. Of course even this glacier is tiring to those who have not good walking powers: and as to get over-fatigued is one of the worst and most insane of actions—and one of the most common—it should only be attempted by the fairly strong. At our feet was the widened valley, through which ran the Flatzbach, quite close to the restaurant, and a little in the distance Pontresina reposed on its slopes. But yet finer and grander scenery lies beyond, where one enters the Bernina Pass.

We remained long, lost in the wonderful view, and then made our quiet way back through the wood-paths: Herr von D. presenting E. with handfuls of the Alpenrose, which, however, he had not risked his life in gathering. We had only to stretch our hands and take them. These wild flowers and ferns, indeed all the plant life and vegetation of the Upper Engadine, form one of the chief attractions of this remarkable valley. The Alpine flora abound, and the Engadine with its high latitudes is especially rich in rare and beautiful specimens. Wherever you go, there they are: hiding themselves in the woods, gemming the green pastures, adorning the margins of lakes and glacier streams in infinite variety.

It is for its wild flowers, not for its cultivated, that the Engadine is famous. The latter are rare and chiefly confined to carnations, calceolarias, pelargoniums, and flora of that description.

Trees also abound, clothing the valleys and stretching far up the slopes, until above them you see rising the white outlines of the peaks, where the eternal snows defy vegetation. They perform a good mission, too, these mountain forests, in preventing the fall of avalanches and landslips, in sheltering the valleys from the keen winds of winter, and so adding to the safety and comfort of the villages nestling in the hollows.

Pine-trees abound. The red pine is the most frequently found, both in the villages and far up the heights, though not in reality a true Alpine specimen. Next comes the *Pinus Larix*, the Larch,

more seen on the slopes than in the valleys. These grow to a great size and are especially beautiful. There is a tree in Russia that resembles it, but belonging to a different family. In the upper part of the forest the *Pinus Cembra*, or Stone Pine, with its large cones containing little nuts that are quite good eating, is chiefly found. They are very hardy and never grow below the level of 6,000 feet. The firs are less numerous, but three specimens are to be met with: the Silver Fir, Mountain Fir, and Creeping Fir. The trunk of the latter spreads over the ground, and only the top of the tree grows straight up.

Among the shrubs the dwarf Juniper with its needles is conspicuous. Of bushes, there are three kinds of Honeysuckle, filling



MORTERATSCH GLACIER.

the air with delicious perfume, the red currant, the dwarf medlar, the rock medlar and the bird cherry.

Of the Alpenroses, which abound in such profusion on the high slopes, there are the rusty-leaved and the hairy-leaved, producing a beautiful and intermediate form of the Alpenrose, which, however, is seldom found. Amongst the low creeping shrubs are the cranberry and bilberry, the lovely heath and graceful azalea.

The true region of the Alpine flora is of course high up the slopes, not in the valleys; yet the natural limits have been passed by the seeds floating upwards or downwards. The plants in the higher regions are chiefly perennial, on the principle of the survival of the fittest. Other flowers are too often destroyed by the severe changes

of temperature. The colours of the Alpine flowers are very vivid and intense, and their size is frequently out of all proportion to the plant. There are three kinds of daphne and many varieties of gentian—the latter an especial Alpine production—together with the primula.

If we turn from Botany to Natural History we again come to distinct Alpine specimens; also, in the Engadine, finding many quite low down that are generally found only in the highest mountain districts of Switzerland. The chamois abounds, and the beautiful but intensely shy and wary creature may be more easily seen here than elsewhere. At one time the whole district was free, and up to 1875 there was no close-time for shooting, but the law was then happily altered. Now chamois may only be shot in September. The beautiful animal is very difficult to get at. He frequents the highest glaciers, and it is chiefly hunger that brings him to the forest.

He starts at daybreak for his grazing grounds, and the sportsman if he wishes success must often start overnight for the hunting-ground. After feeding, the chamois lies down under a rock, and with that marvellous law of precaution that runs through the bird and animal world, is so much the same colour of the rock that it is difficult to distinguish him. He generally remains here quietly the whole day, getting up again to graze in the evening; but his sense of smell is so keen that the slightest breeze will betray the presence of a human being, when he at once takes flight. In the Rosegthal, not far from St. Moritz, the chamois are less timid and will even allow people to pass near to them. They are sagacious creatures. Each herd has a leader who keeps watch from some high rock whilst the others graze. At the first approach of danger he gives a whistle, and the whole herd immediately start off, bounding from rock to rock, taking amazing leaps, headed by the watchman, never stopping their rapid flight until they feel themselves safe.

In summer the coat of the chamois is a reddish-brown, in winter it is grey and long. The meat is good for eating and may be dressed in various ways.

Next come the marmots, living much lower down, nearer the villages, where their whistle may often be heard on the still air. The marmot comes out of his hole to graze very warily, after sunrise. So cautious is he that he creeps out by very slow degrees, then sits up and looks all round for danger before he is satisfied. His sight is amazingly keen, and he sees the smallest moving object at a great distance. He collects his winter food and burrows in October, hibernates during the winter, and reappears in spring a mere skeleton. He quickly grows fat; so much so that for the sake of the fat he is hunted and killed, and the fat will fetch four shillings a quart. The Swiss cook and eat the flesh.

The marmot has many enemies, of which the eagle is the greatest. The squirrel, most graceful of all animals, is seen everywhere: and

the cruel fox is found, and the rapacious marten, which attacks everything of a certain size—hares, marmots, fowls, and small birds, running up the trees for the latter and robbing the nests. Bears are seldom seen, and are growing more and more rare.

Amongst birds there is, first and foremost, the eagle, “inhabiting the high and lofty places”—mountain peaks and inaccessible precipices. He is the great enemy of the chamois, and may occasionally be seen carrying off a fox between his claws. Of tamer birds, there is the beautiful blackcock; the male black with red stripes above the eyes, the female grey. Then come the red-legged partridge and the ptarmigan, in the high regions above the trees. The hazelcock is also occasionally seen; and when not seen its melancholy note may be heard, early in the morning or at sunset, and all day long when the days are grey. For eating, it is the best of all the Engadine birds.

The Alpine crow is seen everywhere, with its red legs and red beak: and amongst birds of prey, besides the eagle, are many varieties of hawks, and the great owl—the latter a magnificent specimen. In the finny world there is only the trout; but it is super-excellent, and poached to an extent almost threatening its extinction.

But to return from this digression to our lovely valley of the Morteratsch, where E., as we went down through the wooded paths, was gradually turning into a bower of Alpenroses, invaluable had she been a Queen of the May.

We found nothing of the privacy and solitude of the Ober Alpina at the restaurant. There was quite a crowd of people scattered at the small tables that were placed in the open air round the house. People had come from all the neighbouring places, some walking through the woods and up the Rosegthal from St. Moritz.

Nor could we wonder: for as we took possession of a little coffee-table that, being more secluded than the rest, had been left vacant, we agreed that the scene was perfect. After all, we scarcely wondered if Pontresina was more popular than St. Moritz. E. sat surrounded by her bower of roses: and an attentive handmaiden brought us delicious coffee (now a great rarity, go where you will) and cakes so excellent that they must have been imported that very hour from Celerina, the work of its Confectioner-in-Chief. It was delightful to sit in the sunshine, and trace the outlines of the mountains, the dazzling snow peaks, the shadows quietly creeping along the glacier; watch the small bands of hardy pedestrians moving over the surface with their slow and measured steps; hear—in imagination—the prodding of their alpenstocks.

We could have sat there until the shades of night fell, and thought the hours had flown too soon, but our return drive must be taken before the shadows were disappearing. Its points were far too fine and numerous to be lost in starlight.

IN A BROUHAM.

IN the drawing-room of an old-fashioned country house sat two ladies. The elder—a typical dowager—was admonishing her great-niece.

"Now, on the eve of your marriage, I shall fulfil my promise of confiding to your care those jewels which have been looked upon for many generations as family heirlooms," said Lady Crossely. "The responsibility——"

"Yes, yes, I'll undertake it!" exclaimed Lilian impatiently. But in spite of her ill-suppressed eagerness, she had to listen to much good advice and many warnings before the flat round case was opened, and the firelight played on a remarkably handsome diamond necklace.

"Oh, Aunt Caroline!" was all Lilian found to say in her first shock of delight. What she intended to convey by this eloquent exclamation was that the jewels far exceeded her most hopeful anticipations. In the bottom of her heart she had always feared that Lady Crossely's intense family pride had led her to over-value the old necklace that for the last quarter of a century had been withdrawn from public view in the strong room of the bank. But this was not the case. The diamonds that flashed and sparkled in their worn leather box would hold their own successfully in any company. Lilian could scarcely believe that they belonged to her in the same sense as her little girlish trinkets. As soon as she dared she would bear them off to her own home and wear them that very evening. Of course they would be ridiculously out of place at a small family party, but she was longing to assert her proprietorship over them.

Lilian's home was a long drive from the old house where Lady Crossely lived, so that starting immediately after tea she would be back none too soon for dinner.

"I think Grey and the horses must have rested by this time," she said to her aunt. "And there are so many things to do at home that I really ought to be returning to help mamma."

This seemed reasonable enough as the last few days before a wedding are generally understood to be a period of excessive flurry and occupation. Lady Crossely therefore told the footman, who was bringing in tea, to order Miss Stuart's carriage to come round in a quarter of an hour, and punctually at the time appointed the pair of stout bay horses stopped in front of the door.

"I mustn't keep old Grey waiting, it makes him so cross," laughed Lilian, saying a hasty good-bye to her aunt, and running off with the

worn leather case tucked safely under her arm. In another moment she was sitting inside the brougham eagerly preparing to examine her splendid new possession as soon as the carriage should turn away from the door.

There was a moment's delay. The footman was offering to come down the drive and see if the gate was open into the road. The old coachman gratefully accepted a suggestion that would save him trouble.

"That's a very civil new man of Aunt Caroline's," thought Lilian. "Her footmen generally have such an objection to making themselves useful opening that gate. He has only just come to the place, I suppose, and not had time to be spoilt yet."

Then she opened the case and glanced inside. The dusk of a winter's evening prevented her examining the necklace at all satisfactorily, but by holding it at a certain angle she could enjoy the reflection of the carriage lamps on the brilliant stones.

The carriage stopped at the gate and Lilian shut the case with a snap. It seemed childish to be seen by the servants gloating over her new ornament. The footman said a few words and old Grey climbed slowly down from the box.

"What's the matter?" inquired Lilian, opening the window a couple of inches.

"Thomas says he thinks one of the horses has picked up a stone," answered the old coachman proceeding to stoop down in the twilight.

Lilian shut the window. It was a cold evening and the fog was getting inside the comfortable, softly-cushioned brougham. She leaned back in a cosy corner and calculated how long it would take to get home and see herself in a looking-glass.

Lilian was very pretty. It was an admitted fact of which she could not help being conscious. And if her appearance had given satisfaction in muslin frocks and the simple ornaments of girlhood, what effect might she not hope to produce in bridal satin surmounted by the beautiful Crossely diamonds?

"What a comfort I'm an only child or they might not have come to me," she murmured thankfully. "Fancy seeing a sister-in-law wearing them! Dear me! What's happened?"

Old Grey, having apparently put the horse to rights, was scrambling back on to the box with unusual speed. He paid no attention to a loud cry that came from the darkness, but slashing rather wildly with the whip, started off at a pace that proved he was extremely anxious to make up for lost time. The cry was repeated more faintly and Lilian pressed her face against the little window at the back of the brougham, straining in vain to penetrate the darkness.

"I hope we didn't drive over that unfortunate Thomas's toe as we started. It would be a poor return for his civility in coming out to open the gate," she thought, dismissing the subject from her mind as she settled down among the cushions.

"They won't be Lady Crossely's diamonds any longer," said Lilian presently. "They'll be Mrs. Bobby Merton's. And Mrs. Bobby Merton will be me." She said the words out loud because she liked the sound of them. She was very fond indeed of Captain Merton, although the glitter of the diamonds had temporarily eclipsed his image in her mind. A little ashamed of this fact, Lilian began to explain to herself how she chiefly valued the diamonds because of the extra dose of admiration her appearance in them would extort from Bobby. He was coming to dinner that evening, and she enjoyed in anticipation his start of surprised delight when she burst upon his sight in all the glory of her new ornament.

So absorbed was Lilian in these peaceful reflections that she did not notice for some time at what an unusual pace the old coachman was driving. An exceptionally violent jerk at last shook her out of her pleasant meditations, and she noticed to her amazement that the stout bay horses were being urged by whip and voice to travel at a sort of lumbering hand gallop.

Could the venerable Grey possibly be drunk? There was profanation in the very thought, and yet how else could one account for this wild disorderly style of driving, so different from the sedate jog-trot at which he usually conducted the brougham?

"This will never do!" exclaimed Lilian, after she had silently endured an intolerable amount of shaking, in the fond hope that the horses would soon settle down again to their ordinary discreet pace. It was a dark evening, with a raw fog rolling in confused billows round the carriage lamps. For some time Lilian could not make out on what part of the road they were, but she felt sure that they must have gone four or five miles on the way home. She put her head out of window, and speaking in as commanding accents as she could assume, told the coachman to pull up at once and drive more steadily.

An inarticulate growl was the only reply, and answering to the lash of a whip wielded with frantic excitement, the horses plunged along faster than ever.

"If you don't stop I'll jump out!" screamed Lilian.

There was a momentary slackening of speed, and the coachman turned on his seat.

"You won't be hurt if you keep quiet," he said. "But if you jump about and scream, I'll just come and bash in your head!"

As the speaker leant over the carriage lamp, the light flashed on his face, and Lilian recognised Lady Crossely's new footman.

The poor girl sank back paralysed by terror at this discovery. As she cowered in a corner, the meaning of those disregarded cries in the darkness dawned upon her. Somewhere far back upon the road poor Grey was doubtless lying disabled by a blow from the cowardly assailant who, having lured the old man from the box, had taken his place unperceived in the darkness.

"Of course, it's those horrid diamonds the wretch is after!" moaned Lilian. "He must have heard all about their being brought from the bank, and then my coming over for the day to receive them. And after all I may be murdered before I wear them! I might throw them out of the window, and then he would stop to pick them up. Yes! and cut my throat at the same time, perhaps! Oh! This is the wrong way! We are over! Oh!"

The horses, accustomed to travelling the same road for many years, took no notice when their driver suddenly tried to turn them off up a narrow lane. With a shower of abuse he hauled violently at one rein, standing up at the same time and cutting at them with the whip. The bewildered animals, beside themselves with fright, turned straight round, the wheel went over a great heap of stones, and for an instant it seemed as if the whole brougham must capsize. A dark body shot past the window and fell heavily in the road, as the carriage, righting itself with a jerk, went lumbering on up the muddy lane.

"He has fallen off the box!" gasped Lilian, not knowing whether to be most glad or sorry. It was a relief to have parted company with one who had uttered such a horrible threat against her life; at the same time the vague swinging from side to side of the unguided horses made her sick and dizzy with apprehension. How she hated the luxurious blue-cushioned sides of the brougham with their stuffy smell of upholstery! A prison that might at any moment become a tomb! Better perhaps to be dashed to pieces instantaneously than be pinned down at the bottom of a ditch under the over-turned brougham, and die by inches of broken limbs on a heap of shattered glass! She was actually opening the door, and preparing to court death by a sudden spring into the darkness, when the carriage mysteriously stopped.

In another moment Lilian was standing with trembling limbs in the muddy lane, noticing with thankfulness how the loose reins had become entangled round the wheels until they had gradually drawn the horses to a stand-still. But hardly had she realized her deliverance, than terror fell upon her worse than any she had felt before, at the sight of a man running forward through the mist and calling to her to stop.

"Here's the necklace! Take it! Only let me go!" she screamed, throwing the jewel case towards him and turning to fly.

"Stop! Don't you know me? Are you mad?" shouted the man.

"And I think you were right and I must have been mad, Bobby, ever to mistake you for that horrid wretch!" said Lilian some time later, when Captain Merton had calmed down her fears and told his tale. It seemed that he had ridden round to Lady Crossely's soon after Lilian left, in the hopes of meeting her there; instead of which he had found poor old Grey crawling up the drive with an ugly cut at the back of his head.

"From the little he was able to tell us we guessed something of the truth, and started in pursuit of the runaway carriage," continued Captain Merton. "The groom and I rode on ahead of the other searchers. He is at the turning holding the horses and mounting guard over the villain who seems to have at least one broken leg. I must go back and look after him. It was a daring attempt! You know he hit poor Grey a violent blow on the back of the head while he was stooping over the horse's foot. Luckily the old fellow's skull was so thick it didn't quite stun him as was intended, or else the alarm mightn't have been given for hours!"

"And I should have been murdered in this lonely lane!" observed Lilian, shuddering.

"I prefer not to contemplate such a horrid possibility," said Captain Merton. "If he could have got you far enough away from the main road to ensure your not giving the alarm, perhaps he would have gone off quietly with the diamonds. And, by-the-by, here they are reposing at the bottom of a rut! On my word, they seem such dangerous possessions that I think in future you had better keep them at the bank, like Aunt Caroline!"

"I don't know about that," murmured Lilian doubtfully.



THE UNBIDDEN GUEST.

AMONG the many unjust prejudices of this wayward world of ours none, I think, are more universal and unfair than those entertained against step-mothers and old maids.

For I have known more than one of the former, whose loving care of children fallen to her charge would have contented the heart of the mother herself, could she have looked back from yensides upon that earth on which she had been forced to abandon her darlings ; and as for the latter, you have only to cast your gaze around your own circle, dear reader, to discover perhaps more than one elderly spinster whose pleasant face finds kindly welcome at any house she may modestly choose to enter. And should you not be quite convinced as to the truth of the latter part of this very long sentence, you have only to read on and make my acquaintance in the following pages. I think you will be converted.

I am one of the much maligned spinsterhood, and have seen thirty odd summers bloom and fade away upon this ever-changing, ever-returning earth of ours.

If there is any truth in marriages being made in Heaven and husbands sent us from above, mine must certainly have lost his way in coming down, for he never turned up ; nor do I recollect ever having come across the being whom I might, for ever so short a time even, have mistaken to be him.

In plain English, I never had the ghost of an offer, and all things seem to have conspired to keep me single.

Read and judge for yourself.

My mother died within two years after my poor father's mysterious disappearance : died, not of any known or defined malady, but of combined grief and nervous incertitude.

On her deathbed she said to me, "Elizabeth, promise to be a mother to Lily."

And oh, how sincerely and sadly did I obey !

Then, when speech was gone, her eyes still fixed in their fading light upon me, I read in their expression the repetition of the last words she ever spoke on earth : " Elizabeth, promise me to be a mother to Lily."

And whilst my own tearful gaze silently renewed my vow, the awful change came over those beloved features ; the eyes glazed, dark shadows gathered round the mouth, the hand I held in mine suddenly relaxed, and I sank upon my knees in an agony of grief beside all that now remained to me of my beloved parent.

From that hour I entered upon my labour of love which, God be thanked, I have never wittingly neglected.

Lily is ten years younger than I am, and at our mother's death had just turned sixteen.

All the weary law-formalities ended, my sister and myself found ourselves in possession of about three hundred a year and the cottage in which we lived. I further was mistress of a sum of five hundred pounds, left me many years earlier by my poor father's only sister. The prospect before us was not brilliant, but neither was it comfortless, and we had every right to look forward with confidence.

Having none but distant relations, with whom we had never kept up any kind of intercourse, I may say that we were left quite alone in the world, and entirely dependent upon each other for affection, sympathy and aid.

Summer was drawing to a close, and I had not, as yet, sketched out any definite plan for our future. I used to think and think as I sat there in the window of our little drawing-room, gazing musingly out upon the garden, with its wealth of old-fashioned flowers and its quaint sun-dial in the centre of the tiny lawn.

Ours was a real cottage, with substantial walls and gabled roof, standing in a garden, and well screened from the high road by a thick shrubbery. There was nothing villa-like about it. It was a home, in short, to awaken contempt in a cotton lord, envy in a crowned head. Always supposing, of course, that either had had the chance of seeing it.

Nailed to the tree overhanging the low white gate was an old board, upon which you might still read a warning as to man-traps and spring guns being set upon the premises. Perhaps they really did once exist, but I never remember having seen them.

One morning, after duly ordering our chicken and bread sauce for the day, I sat down at the familiar window watching Lily as she busied herself training the nasturtiums over the handle of the great green tub which was supposed to represent a basket, in one corner of the lawn, when it suddenly struck me that she was looking alarmingly pale and thin. Perhaps it was the black dress that made her unusually white skin look almost deathly in its purity. Perhaps it was the cluster of damask roses hanging near, that caused her cheek to seem so pale. I could not tell; but, after a few moments' startled reflection, I opened the window and stepped out to join her.

The bright sunshine fell broadly upon that wealth of golden hair, and the deep blue eyes looked lovingly up as I paused before her and gazed with anxious scrutiny into the upturned face.

With a sigh of relief, I passed my arm round her waist and drew her to the bench beneath the great lime tree. She was looking pale, it is true, but that was all; the eyes were cloudless, the lip firm and rosy, and the beautiful filbert-nails as pink as the heart of a sea-shell.

"Tell me, Lily, how would you like to go abroad for a year or two?"

"Abroad, sissy? What could have put such a thing into your head?"

"Why, darling, it is not such an out-of-the-way thing after all, is it? Hundreds of people go——"

"Yes, I know they do; but we have always been such stay-at-homes!"

"I think it would be good for us both. You could get on with your singing, and I with my painting. And then the languages——"

"Where would you think of going?"

"To Italy."

"Oh, Elizabeth!"

"Yes, I know, love. But you see, that should not hinder us. It is true poor papa's last letter was dated Genoa, but that tells us little or nothing. He was to return by Paris, and I fear it was there——"

"Oh, what a dreadful, dreadful story it is!"

"Yes, indeed; and then the incertitude! Though I fear that now there is no longer room even for that. Years have passed, and not a trace discovered, in spite of all that has been done!"

We both sat silent for a while.

"And the dear old cottage?" asked Lily.

"We must try and let it, or, at the worst, leave old Gorden in charge."

"Well, darling, do as you like. You know best, and as long as I haven't to leave you I am content to do anything or go anywhere."

So the matter was settled.

At the end of September we left England for Rome.

My five hundred pounds smoothed everything; and the cottage having been let to a retired naval officer and his wife for a term of three years, we had nothing to hinder us from giving ourselves freely up to the enjoyment of the new life opening out before us.

After spending two years at Rome we turned our faces northwards, having fixed upon Turin as headquarters during the last year of our sojourn abroad. Our choice had been determined by two facts: one, our having a distant cousin married in that city to an Italian gentleman; the other, Madame Boccabodati, the celebrated singing mistress, being established there. For Lily's voice had developed itself wonderfully, and I was anxious to put her under that lady's tuition for a reasonable time.

So one morning, after a fatiguing night-journey, we found ourselves set down bag and baggage at the Hotel Central. The deep blue of the Roman sky was gone, it is true, but in compensation we found ourselves surrounded by comfort such as the Holy City cannot boast of. You can get any amount of magnificence on the Seven Hills, but you look there in vain for the simple conveniences of everyday indoor life.

Our cousin, Countess Albertini, came to see us that same after-

noon. She was a little sharp-eyed woman, much older than I had expected, agreeable enough, but, on the whole, one whom I fancied I would rather have for a friend than an enemy.

"You dine with us to-morrow, of course. I'll send my husband to fetch you at five. Good-bye."

And out she trotted, looking back with twinkling eyes ere she closed the door, and giving us a farewell nod that put me in mind of an elderly bird hopping off to its nest.

"What a queer woman!" murmured Lily, when the door was safely shut.

"She seems kindly disposed, anyhow," I replied. But if my sister had asked me how I liked her I fear I should have been obliged to answer "not overmuch."

Of course, we could not remain at the hotel, therefore the first two or three days were spent in looking for furnished apartments. There were hundreds to choose from, which naturally only increased the difficulty of our choice.

At last, however, we found one that suited—five rooms and a kitchen—in a good situation, Via Carlo Alberto, with drawing and dining-room windows overlooking a large garden; and then, having taken it, hired a nice-looking woman servant, recommended by our civil landlord, and entered into possession of our new abode.

When our things were all unpacked and arranged, and after having sent in a piano and a large basket of plants, the whole looked quite snug, and we sat down with thankful hearts and rested limbs before a blazing fire to enjoy our first cup of tea and chat over the past, present, and probable future.

Lily began her singing lessons that same week, and I tried all I could to find some corner in which to set up my easel, but without success. There was not a suitable place in the whole house.

Once more, however, our landlord came to the rescue.

In the middle of the deserted garden upon which our windows looked stood a pavilion—one long spacious room with a flat roof forming a terrace reached by a narrow staircase built within the thickness of the wall.

There would be no difficulty in hiring it, he said; the garden belonged to the house at the other end, it had once been a hotel, but, deservedly or not, had fallen into evil repute and had ultimately been closed. For years both house and garden had been abandoned. If I wished it, he would arrange everything with the proprietor. There was a little door opening into his own court through which I could pass undisturbed on my way to my studio. Should he go and see about it at once?

The whole thing took my fancy, and I entered heart and soul into the plan which was put into execution that same day. Upon what apparent trifles do the great events of life often depend!

Before the week was out a stove had been placed, the needful

cleaning got through, my painting things carried down, and the key of the pavilion given into my possession.

The routine of our daily life once fairly established, our time passed quickly and pleasantly enough. We rose at eight, and Lily had her singing lesson from nine till ten, then we breakfasted and at once repaired to the pavilion to remain there till three—I at work with my brushes, Lily reading aloud or embroidering, or both chatting away upon such subjects as chance threw uppermost. At three we went out for a walk till five—our dinner hour—after which we rarely left the house except to go to the theatre occasionally, or spend the evening with our cousin.

"Upon my word, Elizabeth, your studio is pleasanter than any drawing-room I know," said the latter to me one day, when, much against my will, she had forced the door of my snugger. "After all none but the English know the meaning of the word comfort. No woman of another nation would have done what you have with so little. Six old chairs and a heathenish table, a few bits of stuff and a dozen flower-pots. I must say it does you credit. What a pity there is that great crack in the ceiling at the other end, and that stain! Are you quite sure it is safe?"

"Oh, quite; the proprietor vouches for it. Yes, you are right; we are very comfortable down here, are we not, Lily?"

"Yes, indeed! I like this place much better than the rooms above."

Neither she, poor child, nor myself had any foreshadowing of what was hanging over us, nor of the terrible scene that, at no distant day, was to be enacted within those walls. I feel my blood run cold even now as I write.

"And you, Lily," continued my cousin, "mind you bring your voice with you to-morrow evening. We are to have music, and I wish you to make a sensation."

"But if it is a large party—" I began.

"Not a bit of it—only a friendly gathering—most of them people you have already seen. Good gracious! half-past two! I must be off. I have a dozen visits to pay before dinner.

I was not very sorry for it upon her account, and was very glad of it on my own; for I was longing to be at peace once more, and at liberty to work away at certain folds of a velvet dress which all that morning had been putting patience and pencil to the test.

If all assembled there were her intimates, my cousin was certainly to be pitied. For they must have numbered more than a hundred upon our entry, to say nothing of those who came later.

I could have fancied myself in Paris—language, toilettes, manners, all were French; even the very furniture, I believe, yellow satin and rosewood, was of Parisian origin. My first predominant feeling was reproach to my cousin for having taken us in, mingled with anger at

myself for having come ; for our simple dresses were uncomfortably at variance with the magnificent millinery of all those fine ladies. However, as I passed through the room on Count Albertini's arm, I had the satisfaction of noting that there was not a face among them all that could be compared with Lily's.

The first quarter of an hour was tiresome enough, but after that I recovered my good humour—I ought never to have lost it—and began to enjoy the scene before me, as well as the kindly attention of which my sister and myself were the objects. Forgetting all about our dresses, I gladly gave myself up to the enjoyment of the hour.

Could I say more in praise of the company in which we found ourselves ? It was almost a revived edition of Madame de Staél and the missing toast.

I was sitting between Lily and a young artillery officer, Captain Malaspina, about the handsomest man I ever saw. I speak as an artist, mind, and not as a woman. A figure for a sculptor, and one of those beautiful oval faces with dark, crisp, curly hair and deep lustrous eyes, a smile womanly in its sweetness, a brow royal in its purity. His conversation, too, was that of a man who, if he had not travelled very much, had, at least, read a great deal, and, what is more, reflected upon what he had read. But in the middle of a most interesting discussion upon ancient Etruria my cousin swooped down upon him and carried him off to the piano to contribute his share of music to the evening's amusement. He sang Gounod's "Medjé," and I was almost tempted to agree with the remark I overheard from a lady near me : "God help the woman who trusts herself to sing with that man ! "

" Doesn't the Captain sing beautifully ? " said my cousin, returning to where Lily and I were sitting. " Five minutes' repose and then it is your turn, my dear, " she continued, facing my sister and laying her thin, bony fingers upon my darling's softly rounded arm.

I was about to object when there arose a movement throughout the room, while a whisper of " the duke ! " passed from mouth to mouth. The next moment a tall, thin gentleman, young, yet prematurely old, stood before us shaking hands with my cousin. At his Royal Highness' request an introduction ensued, after which he remained chatting pleasantly with Lily and myself for a few minutes, and then, with a bow, left us to make his tour of the rooms. But the prince's presence, however flattering to host and hostess, had certainly no enlivening effect upon the assembly in general. It seemed to me as if all the women were waiting to be taken notice of, while the men hung aloof as if half fearing to trespass upon royal prerogative. An air of cold restraint appeared to settle upon all, and for me, the pleasure of the evening was marred.

I was thankful, however, that Lily came off without having to sing before all that assembly of strangers. For there was no longer any

question of music, it being a known fact that the prince and his house, one and all, deemed it a bore. They would not give the shrill note of the war clarion for Meyerbeer's sublimest harmony.

"Is his Royal Highness also one of your friendly gatherings?" said I, in English, to my cousin as we were taking leave.

"Now don't be satirical," cried the little woman with eyes that glittered like black diamonds: "I ask him just to spite my friends. He doesn't go to six houses in the whole town, and you can imagine—"

Captain Malaspina, who was standing by, laughed, and then, in very fair English, asked me if he might see us to the carriage.

Without waiting for an answer he put my arm within his and walked me off downstairs.

I was more vexed than surprised on finding the Captain's card upon our return from walking the next day, and I determined secretly to do my best in order to hinder his getting a footing in our house. I was not going to run any risk of wrecking my Lily's peace of mind by exposing her to the fascinations of such a man. I even resolved upon avoiding him as much as possible at my cousin's or elsewhere. Fate seemed against me; for, from that unlucky evening, he was continually crossing our path. In the streets, at the theatre, under the roof of the few families we visited—everywhere, in fact, did we stumble upon him, much to my own internal annoyance, and more, I fear, to my sister's secret satisfaction. She carefully avoided speaking of him, which appeared to me a bad sign. And the worst of the business was that I could not do anything. I had all to fear, and nothing to complain of. The streets were his quite as much as—nay, more than—mine, while his behaviour was as full of respect as his eyes were of admiration. I sorely feared those eyes of his might wound the white dove so solemnly committed to my charge!

I can smile now at my past uneasiness, but it was a serious burden in those days, I can assure you, and robbed me of many and many a night's rest.

One evening I had been most unpleasantly disturbed by the chance discovery of a scrap of paper with "Carlo Malaspina" pencilled upon it in my sister's hand, and all around it a labyrinth of scrolls and leaves which, I suppose, the poor child intended for laurels.

The name, however, was plain enough, and was quite sufficient to awaken all sorts of apprehension in my mind. Sleep was out of the question. Lily had gone to bed, and there I was all alone with my fancies, and it was not yet eleven o'clock. I went to the window and looked out. Opposite frowned the gloomy walls of the deserted hotel, while below lay the garden, silent and peaceful, with the pale moonlight falling in long slanting rays upon the terraced roof of my pavilion.

"Supposing I went down and finished those tiresome letters of mine," said I to myself.

From idea to determination, and thence to execution, the way was short; and the next moment I crept softly downstairs, lantern in hand, crossed the garden and entered my sanctum. The lamp lighted and myself snugly ensconced in my old leather chair, with my writing-desk before me, I set resolutely to work to clear off arrears of correspondence which my natural laziness had, I confess, suffered to accumulate in formidable proportions.

For a while I worked steadily on, but at last with a sigh of mingled weariness and relief I sank back to indulge in a rest. How still was everything around! Scarcely the roll of a distant carriage reached that retired nook. I gazed around the walls with their faded frescoes, then up at the painted ceiling where two Cupids were cruelly decapitated by an ugly crack which, traversing a large dark blotch, lost itself in the semi-obscurity of the farther corner of the apartment.

"I hope it really is safe," I murmured to myself in momentary doubt. But on recalling to mind the assurances of the landlord, I felt satisfied and quietly continued my musings.

My desk with its simple treasures stood open before me. I took out the little box containing my poor father's last letter and the broad bracelet, or rather armlet, with its mystic Turkish inscription. How sadly my lost parent's glad words upon his approaching return to his family fell upon my heart! Those words were the last tidings we had ever had—his loving assurances and our own anxious hopes had all vanished, hidden beneath a veil of impenetrable mysterious darkness.

Tears dimmed my eyes as I laid down the well-worn sheet and took up the massive gold armlet which my father, half in jest, half in earnest, used to speak of as a talisman. But I forgot. I have not yet told you about it.

In early youth my father spent several years in the East, and on some occasion or other had been the means of rendering signal service to a Smyrna merchant, who, from that day, conceived a warm friendship for his English benefactor. On my father's leaving to return to England, his friend gave him two armlets, exactly alike, covered with hieroglyphics and studded with turquoise. He insisted upon having the one riveted upon my father's upper arm, and placed the other in his hand, charging him to give it, in his name, to the woman whom he made his wife later on in life.

The injunction was obeyed, and from her wedding-day till the hour of her death, the armlet was never out of my poor mother's possession. Its fellow was, of course, lost in the mysterious disappearance which had deprived mother and daughters of their chief support in life.

My father had left us in the best of health for Marseilles upon business, and on his way home wrote from Genoa, saying that he

was returning *via* Paris, and fixing the very day and hour of his arrival. Nothing further was ever heard of him. Not a trace was ever discovered in spite of the ceaseless efforts made by my poor mother to clear up the terrible mystery.

I lay back in my chair with the armlet in my hand, and memory sped back to days gone by, causing my whole past to surge up before me. My dear father's well-remembered face gleamed forth from every page of my book of life, and I seemed to hear even the tones of his kind, manly voice greeting Lily and myself on our return from the daily morning walk. Ah, those were happy days, and now—

A slight noise startled me. I could not tell whence it came, but it had sounded like the creak peculiar to new furniture, only muffled and less sharply defined. I sat forward and listened. Unbroken silence, only the beating of my own heart and the surging sound born of overstrained ears.

"I must have been mistaken," I said to myself as I sank back once more in my chair; "furniture it couldn't have been, for the chairs and tables are old and dry as the hills. Perhaps a mouse—"

Then it came again, almost like a rap this time. And from somewhere above. I looked up. Nothing but the crack, the broad dark stain evidently produced by leakage from the terrace, and the decapitated Cupids. I continued my gaze upwards, for a strange fascination seemed to rivet my eyes upon that time-blotched discoloured old ceiling. But a third repetition of the mysterious sound made me start to my feet in sudden terror. There might be somebody upon the terrace above! How earnestly I wished myself back in the house once more. And then I fixed my eyes in terrified expectant gaze upon the narrow door which gave access to the ladder-like stairs leading to the roof above. Would it suddenly open? And if so, what—who would appear?

My heart stood still for a moment, then softly I stretched out my trembling hand, turned down the lamp, and crept silently to the entrance. In a second I was outside and the key turned in the lock. Then a short run and I found myself at the foot of the great staircase just as the portress was about to extinguish the gas.

"Buona sera, signorina," she cried; "ha lavorato tardi stasera!"

"Buona notte," I replied, and hurried up to reach our doorway while there was yet light for the purpose.

On visiting the pavilion the next morning I found everything just as I had left it. Only my poor father's letter lay upon the ground.

"I suppose I swept it down in reaching to extinguish the lamp," I thought to myself. "And as to the noise, it must have been a mouse after all. How very silly of me to have been so frightened!"

"My dear," said my cousin, "Malaspina's mother has arrived from

Florence and wishes to make your acquaintance. You have no objection, I suppose?"

I hated her manner of calling men thus by their surnames. I suppose her long garrison life had given her the habit; her husband was now a lieutenant-colonel *en retraite*.

"Well," I answered, crossly enough too, I fear, "I don't see much use in making the acquaintance. We are here like birds on the bough, you know; and I—"

"What matters? I wouldn't refuse if I were you. One never knows what may turn up."

"Oh, as to that—"

"Did I ever tell you that Malaspina has a clear two thousand a year, and that, together with his title—"

"What does it matter to me?"

"Well, my dear, to you personally certainly nothing, but as regards Lily—"

"Please don't mix up Lily's name with Captain Malaspina's."

"If I don't, others do. Why, all the town is talking about it!"

"Talking about what?" I cried in angry amaze. "What business has the town to—"

"Come, come, don't get excited. Such things occur daily."

"What things?"

"Why, men and maidens falling in love, to be sure. Do you suppose people are blind?"

"But who dares say that Lily—"

"My dear, the world dares say anything it pleases. The only way is not to listen. And, after all, what is the harm in the case? If Malaspina were not serious, do you think he would drag his mother here all the way from Florence, and just in the gay season too? What an unreasonable old thing you are, to be sure!"

It was wonderful to hear my cousin, who was full fifteen years my senior, coolly call me an "old thing." In my angry astonishment I quite forgot to answer her as I ought to have done.

Lily, of course, was not present at this discussion, the upshot of which was that we were to meet the Marchioness Malaspina at our cousin's the following evening.

"Quite a family party!" cried the Countess, with a curious mixture of triumph and regret in her shrill voice.

"Not a friendly gathering this time, I hope," said I, as we shook hands.

"No, dear, and not even a Royal Highness. I keep him for great occasions, you know. Good-bye."

Poor woman! She was a born matchmaker. Only every victory was also a grief—it left one object the less to conquer.

Mother and son resembled each other to a wonderful degree. The same expression, the same perfect oval, the same soft dark eyes.

Only her face was turned towards the sunset of life, while upon his the bright rich flush of morning yet glowed.

Her first shake of the hand was for me, but even while she gave it, her eyes rested upon Lily in kind yet earnest scrutiny. I read in their gaze that her mother's heart was satisfied.

This was the first of a long series of pleasant evenings—real family gatherings this time—passed either at my cousin's, the Marchioness' hotel, or at our own home.

For, to be brief, before the week was out, Lily was engaged to the handsome artillery captain with the full consent of all parties concerned.

Her evident joy never flung a shade of sadness across my own happiness ; her only stipulation had been the one which secured me a residence under her roof whenever and for as long as I might choose to avail myself of it.

All our domestic arrangements indeed were easy to make and pleasant to carry out, the legal formalities were just the reverse. I advise no one who can help it to get married in Italy. The law business attendant is interminable, the documents required endless in number. And in our case the difficulties were trebled. The whole affair literally bristled with them. The uncertainty overhanging our poor father's fate, the difference of religion, caused us a thousand vexatious delays, which perhaps only the high connexions and elevated social standing of the bridegroom-elect were able finally to put an end to. As it was, the day could be fixed only for the first of June ; for, even could all have been got in readiness before, the Italians have a superstition against marrying in the merry month of May—which, of course, it was neither Lily's place nor my own to cavil at.

Spring came late, but at last there was the breath of wallflowers upon the breeze, and the tardy tassels of the wisteria burst forth in their glad loveliness. The purple of the wooded hills had given place to soft, tender green, and violets had long lurked beneath every sunny hedgerow.

We now almost lived in the old pavilion. With widely opened windows we worked, read, and chatted there, varying our occupations by a stroll round the neglected garden, which, thanks to the absence of gardener's scissors, had burst forth into a very wilderness of blossom and beautiful brightness.

Even the old deserted hotel looked less grim and sinister ; and though its closed windows, with their mysterious absence of all life, contrasted strangely with the shower of golden sunshine around, their silent sullenness ceased to chill and oppress as in the cold, grey days of the gloomy winter. I no longer used to fancy weird eyes peering down upon me through the chinks of the peeling weather-stained shutters.

Nay, with the glad sunshine falling broadly around us, Lily and myself would at times talk freely over the dark tales rife in the neighbourhood, while we laughingly wondered upon what basis of popular ignorance they had been founded.

For perhaps, after all, they were but a myth. No actual proof had ever been adduced. Mysterious hints and open gossippings had ruined the business quite as effectually as the loudest law-interference ever could have done.

It requires so little to ruin a reputation, be it that of a hotel or a human being!

I was sitting lounging in my favourite American chair just outside the door of the pavilion, the *Revue des Deux Mondes* on my knees, a Japan honeysuckle waving its flower-laden sprays above my head. Lily and Carlo were within—she seated at the table ostensibly engaged in copying some music (I think it must have been the “Ah, non giunge” of the ‘*Sonnambula*’), he bending over her and from time to time whispering into her willing ear. I could see the motion, though I could not catch the sound.

The warm sunshine was doubly enjoyable, for it had been raining for a whole week, as it can rain only in Turin and Paris.

I daresay you remember to what Napoleon I. once likened Piedmont. If not, I am sorry at being unable to write the word for your edification.

Well, never mind. I felt so contented and lazy that spring morning, with the smell of the warm damp earth floating around and mingling with the scent of the hyacinths just bursting into bloom, so happy in my luxuriant idleness that I felt half vexed when, raising her head, Lily called out :

“ Do come here a moment, Sissy. I want to tell you something.”

“ What is it, love ? ” I asked, as with an inward groan I rose from my too-comfortable place.

“ I want our marriage contract to be signed here, and not in those closets of rooms up there. It will be so much nicer, you know. There is plenty of space, and Carlo says he will send us a cartload of flowers.”

“ But, my dear, the closets, as you call them, are quite large enough to hold all our little party, and there is no fear of damp. The pavilion is well enough in the daytime, but at night——”

“ It will be just charming, you dear old thing. Now, please don’t be unkind, Sissy. Besides, you know, it was Carlo’s idea, and so you must——”

“ But do you think the Marchioness won’t object to——”

“ Oh, I’ll answer for my mother,” cried Carlo, “ if that is all.”

And of course that settled it.

When the eventful evening arrived, Carlo had more than kept his

word. He had transformed the old weather-stained place into a bower of loveliness. The walls were completely hidden beneath a tapestry of green boughs, thickly studded with flowers of every size and colour. The polished floor shone like a mirror, shabby furniture and easels had vanished, to give place to deep broad sofas at one end; while the whole was brilliantly illuminated by a profusion of wax lights, disposed around in girandoles.

Of all the ancient shabbiness nothing remained but the discoloured ceiling. The large dark stain and the irregular crack, severing the dingy Cupids' heads from their dingier bodies, frowned straight down upon the table, upon which lay the contract ready for signature, flanked by a pair of gigantic candelabra, and mounted guard over by my poor father's antique silver inkstand.

The whole scene below was so bright and pleasant to look upon that none cared to notice the decapitated beings overhead. We were but human after all, and humanity is so terribly prone to cease turning his thoughts on high while all around him here below is dressed in smiles.

At nine o'clock we had all assembled; my cousin and her husband, Lily and myself, the Marchioness and her son, the English consul, and one or two of Carlo's relatives—not to forget the little bald-headed lawyer and his assistant.

"Just twelve, my dear," said my cousin, after looking round and counting. "How very lucky de Tounay was taken ill! He would have made thirteen, you know. What should we have done?"

"You don't mean to say you are superstitious?" laughed Carlo.

"Of course I am. I wouldn't be the thirteenth present at a marriage contract for anything in the world!"

Poor little woman! The unbidden guest came at his self-appointed moment, and— But I must not anticipate.

One after another we signed, in what order I cannot say, for my thoughts were in a whirl, and my eyes blinded by tears as the little lawyer put the pen into my trembling hand. It seemed as if I were signing my Lily's death-warrant, and that my mother's gentle spirit was hovering round in silent upbraiding. But it was done, and then we all gathered upon the broad low sofas at the other end of the long room, awaiting the coming in of the refreshments.

"Well," said the little lawyer, smiling blandly, "as there is no one else to sign, I suppose I may as well put the contract into my pocket. Just fold it carefully up," turning to the clerk, who was sitting uneasily upon the extreme edge of a chair next him, "and bring it here to me."

The young man jumped up and made a step forward, but only one. For at the same instant there was an ominous crack from above, a shower of dust and rotten lath fell upon the table, dimming the wax lights burning upon it, and whilst we were gazing in mute astonishment and terror at the unexpected sight, a skeleton arm slowly

protruded itself from the gaping fissure, swung noiselessly down and then remained suspended there, with ghastly fingers pointing to the marriage contract immediately beneath. Upon the dry bones gleamed a golden amulet, the fellow to the one lying within my writing-desk. The lost father had come back to witness his daughter's marriage contract!

I can tell you nothing of the terrible confusion that ensued. Of course justice stepped in, and, as far as possible, the dark history was pieced together and published.

When murdered—for murdered my poor father had been, though the dastards that did the deed could never be discovered—his assassins must either have overlooked the jewel riveted upon his upper arm, or else have thought it wiser to leave it untouched. Be it as it may, there it was; and after lying in darkness for long years, between the floor of the terrace above and the ceiling of the room beneath, had come to light to clear up a family mystery hitherto impenetrable, and testify to the orphan daughters the foul play to which their parent had fallen a victim. And to think how many hours we had passed there, how many a careless word we had spoken, how many a light laugh we had given vent to! And all with that terrible secret darkly suspended above our unheeding heads.

Of course Lily's wedding was put off, and it was only a few weeks ago that Captain and Mrs. Malaspina—I don't give them their title of Marquis and Marchioness, though they have undoubtedly right to it, for here in England, where I am now writing, foreign titles sound so ill—set out upon their wedding tour, from which I hope to welcome them back in a few days to our old cottage, which I have promised myself never more to abandon.

There—my story is done. I began it with an endless phrase, and have, I fear, finished it with an ill-constructed one.

Be indulgent, dear reader, and try also in future to be less hard in your judgment upon that much-columniated portion of humanity denominated "old maids."

A. BERESFORD.

HEAVENLY HOMESICKNESS.

"My life nor death I winna crave,
Nor fret, nor yet despond ;
But a' my hope is in the grave,
And the dear hame beyond."—*James Hogg.*

THERE are some souls, and those not only of poets or mystics, to whom their stay in this world is always more or less of an exile, who eat its bread and mount its stairs with something of banished Dante's feeling of bitterness and strangeness, and whose whole life is a longing for the signal of release to more congenial climes. They will mingle, and often kindly, with their fellows, and honestly perform their share of the world's work, but always more or less with a sense of aloofness from it all, as if they had fallen into this existence by mistake, and were ill at ease in it—like the strayed angel of Mr. Wells's ingenious story.

This air of strangeness to the scene about them is more especially to be remarked in young children, and has been made by many (as by Wordsworth) a text on which to hang their theories of a pre-natal existence. Some outgrow it; to others it clings through all their worldly way.

It is not always that they despise earth's beauty, or regard her pleasures in a churlish mood. The strangers' land may be lovely, her people all that is amiable, but the exile's heart is sick for his own kinsfolk and for home. Any other abode is a prison to him.

George Macdonald, lover of his fellows though he is, has well expressed the feeling, and expressed it over and over again: "I knew that my soul had ever yet felt the discomfort of strangeness, more or less, in the midst of its greatest blessedness. I knew that as the thought of water to the thirsty *soul* . . . such is the thought of home to the wanderer in a strange country."

Through all the trials and depressions of life such spirits never lose the sharp edge of their desire after the Heavenly Country. Their longing remains fresh and eager to the last. And just as in a strange land whatever speaks to one of home—a flower, the song of a bird—brings a rush of longing to the heart, so also by these waters of sorrow, when the spirit seems to catch some token from the land she looks to as her own, her longings are stirred within her. "Know'st thou the Land?" she seems to ask of all around, piecing together in her memory, like Goethe's Mignon, stray glimpses and recollections of her early home. "'Tis there—'tis there that I would go!"

This wistful spirit shines through the hymn of St. Bride, the sixth-

century Irish saint, of which Froude translates the opening stanzas from the old chronicles :

"Bride, the queen, she loved not the world ;
She floated on the waves of the world
As the sea-bird floats upon the billow :

Such sleep she slept as the mother sleeps
In the far land of her captivity,
Mourning for her child at home."

"What a picture is there," exclaims Froude, "of the strangeness and yearning of the poor human soul in this earthly pilgrimage!"

It is under the symbol of a sunflower languishing for the light that Blake addresses the longing soul :

"Ah, Sunflower, weary of time,
Who contestest the steps of the sun ;
Seeking after that sweet golden clime
Where the traveller's journey is done."

George Herbert, in a poem lovely as the thing it treats of, "The Flower," images himself as a flower drooping in the alternate chills and heats of an uncertain clime, and pining for his proper garden :

"O that I once past changing were
Fast in Thy Paradise, where no flower can wither!"

With a kindred fancy Andrew Marvell compares the soul to a drop of dew, "shed from the bosom of the morn," which, careless of its new abode, though it be the rose's heart, reflects within its tiny globe the heaven it came from :

"How it the purple flower does slight,
Scarce touching where it lies ;
But gazing upon the skies
Shines with a mournful light."

Spenser cannot keep his longings within bounds. He is of those he himself speaks of who, admitted to the vision of "Heavenly Beauty," enjoy such pleasure thereof

"That it doth bereave
Their soul of sense, through infinite delight,
And them transport from flesh into the spright."

In which state they see and hear such heavenly things as to make all earth's glories appear to them "but feignèd shadows":

"So full their eyes are of that glorious sight, . . .
That in naught else on earth they can delight,
But in th' aspect of that felicity
Which they have written in their inward eye."

Yet Spenser was a worshipper of earthly beauty too. Some refuse even to see any charm in this world, so absorbed are they in con-

temptation of the next. It is in an access of this nostalgia of the soul that Schiller cries, in his "Sehnsucht":

"From this valley darkened over
With cold mists that blot the sky,
Could I but the way discover,
O how blest, how fain were I!"

till, from the very intensity of his longing, is evolved a definite vision of the land of his desire, on whose sights and sounds his raptured spirit broods.

The same note of repulsion from earth, of the exile's thirst for native springs, runs through much of the Ettrick Shepherd's verse, strange mixture of mysticism and earthliness that he was:

"Farewell, ye homes of living men!
I have no relish for your pleasures—
In the human face I nothing ken
That with my spirit's yearning measures :
I long for onward bliss to be,
A day of joy, a brighter morrow ;
And from this bondage to be free ;
Farewell, thou world of sin and sorrow !"

The lines occur in his poem "Maria Gray."

"How cold this clime !"

sighs Norris,—

"How long, great God, how long must I
Immured in this dark prison lie !"

"Here's nothing worth a smile!" says Quarles, whose song of yearning addressed to the souls in Heaven has a note of almost passionate petulance, as of a sobbing child for the moment blind and deaf to all but his overmastering desire.

"Here is no home, here is but wilderness,"
says Chaucer.

"Heaven is our home, we are but strangers here,"

cries Michael Drayton, and the line might have given the keynote to many of those hymns whose motive is the homesickness of the spirit for its native land.

One of Lamb's old dramatists, Thomas Middleton, thus graphically describes the attitude of one of these waiting souls:

"When the heart's above, the body walks here
But like an idle serving-man below
Gaping and waiting for his master's coming.
He that lives fourscore years is but like one
That stays here for a friend : when death comes, then,
Away he goes, and is ne'er seen again."

The Christian in this world, says another, is like one transacting a piece of troublesome business in the rain. He would not shirk it, but is thankful to have it done.

It is told of the devoted Charlotte Maria Tucker (A. L. O. E.) that being ill once, and hearing she was likely to die, her joy was so excessive that it acted as a restorative, and she failed for another season of her heaven. The missionary, Dr. Judson, dying after a lifetime of toil and suffering, declared he felt "like a boy bounding home from school."

These homesick spirits may be discovered by the looseness with which they sit to the things of earth, as if it were hardly worth while to settle down amid their worldly belongings. Mr. Edmund Gosse noticed this quality in Stevenson. If men were to dally with the thought of death they would never have heart enough to begin to live, was one of Stevenson's own sayings.

It was a touching utterance of Romanes, a later St. Augustine fallen on sceptical days, when, the Sunday after his last fatal seizure, on the eighty-fourth psalm with its burden of longing after the Divine Courts being read to him, he cried, "I can hardly bear that psalm; I *have* longed so much."

In vain for such spirits does nature spread her fairest scenes. To them she can never be more than a nurse holding them back from the parental knees. Her loveliness only serves to intensify their longing for that unseen land of whose beauty they consider all visible beauty to be but the faint, unsatisfying reflection.

The Norwegian romancist, Björnstjerne Björnson, recalls the impression made on his childish spirit by the loveliness of the landscape around Naesset, in the Romsdal, where his father was pastor. "Here in the parsonage," to quote his own words as given by Mr. Gosse, "I would stand at the close of the day and gaze at the sunlight playing over mountain and fjord, until I wept, as though I had done something wrong. Here, too," he goes on, "I, descending on my snow-shoes into some valley, would pause as though bewitched by a loveliness, by a longing which I had not the power to explain."

All beauty, whether of earth, of skies, or of the human face, is apt to have this disquieting effect upon the soul. Maeterlinck speaks of that "strange, indescribable fear of beauty," resembling the fear of silence, or of truth, which comes at times over even the most ordinary men, and this in spite of man's inborn craving after beauty. It is as if to a thirsty man were presented a drink of cold clear water at which, though he may put his lips to it, he may not quench his thirst.

"Oh, my spirit!" sighs Tieck, torn with the pangs of such a thirst, "it is thou that strivest within me after something unearthly, which it is granted unto no man here to enjoy."

We all seem to acknowledge in these moments of mystical recognition, whenever amid earth's shows and shadows we catch some reflected glimpse of Heaven, that there awaits us some wondrous

Home beyond. That, as St. Augustine puts it, in a prayer to the Lord of that fair Land, we are all "fellow-citizens in that eternal Jerusalem which thy pilgrim people sigheth after from their Exodus, even unto their return thither." What did Marcus Aurelius mean, that saint among heathen, that heathen among saints, he whose doubts of God and immortality never slept, though his hopes were ever waking, when he wrote, "The poet says, 'Dear city of Cecrops! Shall I not say, 'Dear City of God?'" Or Boëthius, the fifth century Roman philosopher, and accounted of rather as a Platonist than a Christian, by the saying (in his 'De Consolatione Philosophiae') which has been thus rendered :

"If ever again thou to Heaven shalt go,
Soon wilt thou say, and be sure it is so,
'This is mine own country in every way,
The earth of my birth, and my heirdom for aye :
Hence was I born, and came forth in my time,
Through the might of my Maker—the Artist Sublime,
Nor will I go out evermore, but stand fast,
At the will of my Father, come hither—at last."

The Swedish poet, Bishop Tegnér, boldly enunciates that doctrine of pre-existence in a diviner state which Wordsworth so deprecatingly, under the veil of his own childish experiences, put forward :

"Man's soul, the offspring of Eternity,
Fettered to time and exiled from his home,
Drags at his prison chain incessantly
For he remembers well his Fatherland,
Mansions of glory, where a brighter sun
Shone round him ; fairer flowers were blooming there,
And on him, friendly-wise, the angels smiled.
Earth then appears too narrow, too confined ;
With heavenly longings then the wanderer pines
For home."*

Over all of us it comes at times, this feeling of unrest and strangeness—a sense of insecurity in the most peaceful scenes, a longing for we know not what. The thoughts of the exile, failing of the hope of restoration to his native country, will turn to the heavenly Fatherland rather than settle in an alien spot. This is the motive of Allan Cunningham's song of exile, "My ain Country," beginning :

"The sun rises bright in France !"

Pain and sorrow turn our hearts towards its sorrowless shores. There, says Luther, we shall be "everywhere at home. Here it is not so. We are driven hither and thither, that we may have to sigh after that heavenly Fatherland."

To many, the heavenly homesickness does not come till the dismantling of their earthly home. For, as George Macdonald says,

* "The Children's Communion" : translated by J. E. D. Bethune.

"the hert aye turns to the hame," and when our home here ceases to be home, then will the heart look beyond, above the stars to find it:

"For o' a' the hames there's a hame
 Herty, an' warm, an' wide,
 Whaur a' that maks hame ower the big roun' earth
 Gangs til its hame to bide."

It comes over some at the end of life's journey. "The far future has been my word always," wrote Tennyson to Emily Sellwood, his wife to be. But it is in recalling him as an old man, over eighty years, that his son Hallam writes: "My father often now longed for the quiet Hereafter where all would be made clear."

George Macdonald's "canty granny" looks forward to being young and beautiful again in the land of eternal youth and beauty. To the aged the world seems to have grown cold; they crave the reviving beams of Paradise. This longing of the old is set forth by the author of "The Gentle Life" in his poem "The Last Boat":

"Musing I sit upon the shore,
 Awaiting till the boat shall come,
 And bear me to my far-off home,
 To cease from wandering evermore.
 The day is dying; morn and noon
 And sober afternoon are gone;
 Yet the boat comes not, and alone
 I wait, and for its coming swoon.
 I would be home before the night
 Sets in to freeze my spirit chill."

Death often serves as the magnet that compels our restless wavering spirits away from earth towards the borders of their future home. With every attraction to the unseen world, whether through the passing thither of a friend, or through our own fancied approach to its mysterious shores, we acquire a new interest in it, until at last our hopes and aspirations begin to centre there. The invisible drawbridge has been let down, and we fancy the forms of familiar, or of shining presences upon it. We feel with Whittier:

"Another hand is beckoning us,
 Another call is given;
 And glows once more with Angel-steps
 The path which reaches Heaven."

Dante experienced something of this rending asunder of the dividing veil on the passing hence of Beatrice—of this vision of ascending and descending angels betwixt earth and heaven. So also does Mrs. Browning touch on this strange transporting effect of the death of a beloved one on the survivors:

"We catch up wild at parting saints,
 And feel Thy heaven too distant."

The wind that swept them out of sin
Has ruffled all our vesture;
On the shut door that let them in
We beat with frantic gesture.
To us, us also,—open straight!
The outer life is chilly."

"Surely," says the old German divine, Bengel, "when the door of Paradise is opened to let in any of our departed friends, delicious breezes blow through it from that abode of blessedness."

Sometimes, again, it is not until one lies oneself on one's death-bed that these heavenly longings are stirred. It was Heine who, under the influence of wasting disease, wrote (in the preface to his "Romancero," 1851): "When one lies on one's death-bed one gets very sensitive and impressionable, and wants to make peace with God and the world. Yes, I have returned to God, like the prodigal son, after tending swine with the Hegelians. Heavenly homesickness came over me, and drove me forth through woods and ravines and over the dizziest paths of dialectics." And the profession was accompanied by deeds which proved it to be genuine, such as the destroying of certain of his writings whose tendency he deemed injurious to religion.

Schiller's sensitive spirit shrank from the cold dark river of death which would have to be crossed before the heavenly heights of his vision were reached. To others, the beauty of those heavenly hills overflows even into the valley of the shadow of death. It may be partly from their glorious heights that the shadow is cast, and on the dark waters that have to be gone through is reflected a glimmer of radiance from the city of light. The flash of angel faces lights the gloom, snatches of celestial music break the stillness, so that the dying ear turns from all of earth to listen for them, the dying eye fixes its solemn unchanging gaze on the vision which at last, after its days and nights of longing, is rising before it.

The Germans have added a beatitude to those pronounced by our Saviour on the mountain: "Blessed are the homesick, for they shall be brought home."

P. W. ROOSE.



THE BEST-LAID SCHEMES.

"JANE JUDSON'S marriage has turned out so unfortunate," said Miss Bona hesitatingly, "that it makes me quite shrink from interfering in anything of the kind again. She said yesterday that if we had left her alone she would have married John Thomas."

"Pooh!" said Miss Huldah contemptuously, "that woman could never be satisfied! If she had married John Thomas, she would have hankered after her present husband. That is nothing to go by!"

"Perhaps not, dear."

"Of course not. Besides," went on Miss Huldah in a strident voice, "we are not so young as we were, and it is necessary that Gerald should have a wife to entertain his guests and revive the days when we used to lead society here. He never will marry if it is left to himself, and he is getting on in years—he was forty-seven last month. It is a duty he owes to society to take a wife who can fully represent him. *We* can't do it. *We* are a couple of old fogies!"

Miss Bona murmured a faint protest.

"Yes, we are," said Miss Huldah fiercely, shaking her stiff gray curls. "Don't contradict me, Bona! A quiet dinner, an occasional visit, and all our parish work are as much as we are fit for. The name of Royal is sinking into oblivion."

"Not while it appears on the title-pages of dear Gerald's books," said her sister softly.

"Pooh!" said Miss Huldah, waving her hand deprecatingly. She affected to make light of her clever nephew's works. But woe betide anyone else who did so! "Not one person in a hundred cares to read of antiquities nowadays; and I don't approve of a man burying himself as Gerald does. Now, a charming wife would soon turn him to a more natural way of living. She must be a woman of refined tastes, cheerful, clever, and an ornament to society. We must set to work at once. Now let—me—see." Miss Huldah laid down her scissors, and stared fixedly into the fire for a minute or two, then exclaimed triumphantly:

"The very one! Now guess, Bona!"

"Any one here, dear?"

"Here! Good gracious! Do you think Sir Gerald Royal of Royalmore could find a wife *here*? Tut! tut! What do you say to Mrs. Damien?"

"Mrs. Damien, of course! How clever you are, Huldah!"

Miss Huldah accepted this statement with a complacent smile.

"But is she in England?"

"She returned to London last week; I heard this from Anne this morning. I will write to Mrs. Damien at once, and ask her here for

a long visit. That will be the first step. Gerald and she are old friends, and with a little—a very little delicate diplomacy on our part, I am positive that propinquity will do the rest."

"But, sister, her husband has been such a short time dead—only eighteen months! The poor thing will hardly have got over the bitterness of her loss yet. I am afraid she will have little inclination for visiting."

"Pooh!" said Miss Huldah, coming out with her favourite expression. "Quite time for her to lighten her mourning, and go a little into society. I will tell her that our lovely air will do her good, and she must come *now* if she wants to see my daffodils in perfection."

Just as Miss Huldah seated herself at her writing-table the door opened, and a tall, brown-haired maiden entered, carrying an enormous tray covered with china bowls and quaint tapering glasses filled with daffodils of every shade of yellow from the deepest gold to the faintest primrose. Up jumped Miss Huldah in shocked protest.

"My dear Persis! surely one of the servants could carry that for you! Such a very unnecessary thing for you to do!"

"Not a bit of it!" said Persis Morrison, laughing merrily. "I love to do it! Do you think I could trust your delicious old glass to the mercy of that very fine Thomas of yours? Besides, the motto of Miles Standish is mine too—'If you wish a thing to be well done, you must do it yourself—you must not leave it to others.'"

All the time she was speaking she was moving about the room, arranging the flowers on tables and stands until the old oak-panelled parlour was full of golden lights.

"Thank you, my dear," said gentle Miss Bona; "you arrange the flowers so prettily!"

"In such perfect taste," emphasized Miss Huldah, looking over her spectacles approvingly. "You know what Gerald said, Bona? That the floral arrangements on the dinner-table had been a feast of loveliness since Miss Morrison came. I wonder, child, how we ever got on without you?"

"And after working so hard with Gerald (I hope he is not overworking you in his enthusiasm!), you let us monopolise every minute of your spare time."

"Indeed," said the girl in her brisk, cheerful voice, "you are all too good to me. I can never do enough to shew my kind employers how grateful I am."

"My dear," said Miss Huldah solemnly, "I cannot allow you to use such a term as 'employers' with us."

"But, indeed, dear Miss Huldah, it is necessary that I should not forget that I am Sir Gerald's paid servant. I assure you I am too often inclined to forget my real position."

A shadow fell over her bright face; she bent her head and touched with her lips the tiny wrinkled hand of Miss Bona that lay on her shoulder.

"There, I must go now ; Sir Gerald will be ready for me. He was in splendid vein this morning, but he works too hard."

"Soon," said Miss Huldah with sly importance, "I trust we may have someone here who will win him more from his books—some one whose attractions he will not be able to resist."

"A relation ?" asked the girl quickly. "It will be good for him, of course, to have a little more relaxation ; but it would be a pity if the 'Ancient Irish Dwellings' were entirely neglected just when it is so near completion."

"Oh, we must not be too exacting ! But my nephew will not be able to forget that we have a lady visitor in the house."

"Oh, a lady ! Lady Anne, I suppose ?"

"No, it is not my cousin, but Mrs. Damien. Surely you have heard us speak of Mrs. Damien ?"

"Of Mildred Damien," put in Miss Bona. "She is a widow, poor thing ! My nephew thinks her charming. They were great friends before her marriage."

"When is she coming ?"

"I am writing to her to-day to fix an early date. We hope—I think, Bona, we can speak freely to Persis ? There can be no harm in letting her know our thoughts on this subject ?"

"No harm at all, Huldah."

"We are ardently hoping that in our friend Mrs. Damien, my dear nephew will find a wife."

"A wife !" echoed the girl dully. "I beg your pardon," she added quickly, "but it is difficult to imagine Sir Gerald with a wife."

Miss Huldah looked annoyed.

"Wait until you see Mrs. Damien."

At the door the girl turned round :

"Is she very beautiful ?"

"Very beautiful—most beautiful," said Miss Huldah emphatically. "Though I have not seen her for five years, I hear she has lost none of her good looks. She is a pocket Venus—dark hair and eyes."

The door closed with a decided snap in the very midst of Miss Huldah's eulogy. But she was thinking too much of the subject to notice Miss Morrison's bad manners.

Mrs. Damien accepted the invitation with avidity. She wrote such a charming little letter of grateful thanks that Miss Bona was touched and her sister hugely pleased.

Mrs. Damien was to arrive in the afternoon of the following Saturday, and, as an act of special favour, Miss Huldah determined to go in the carriage herself to meet her guest.

When the train drew up at the station, Miss Huldah searched vainly for the sombrely-clad figure of the expected visitor, and was turning disappointedly away when a silvery voice close beside her said :

"Dearest Miss Huldah, how glad I am to see you again !"

And there in front of her, instead of the pathetic widowed form, was a radiant little creature in an elaborate travelling-coat of mauve cloth, with a toque of mauve velvet perched coquettishly on a mass of feathery golden curls.

"Good gracious!" was all Miss Huldah could gasp out. She prided herself on her self-possession and good breeding under the most trying circumstances. But on this occasion they both deserted her. "Good gracious!" she said feebly. She looked helplessly at the waiting-maid, quite as elaborately got up as her mistress, standing behind laden with dressing-case and wraps.

"I didn't know you, Mildred!"

"Ah, you find me changed?" said Mrs. Damien, looking down with a sad little smile. "I have come through so much. But with you I shall cast aside all sorrowful recollections and become quite cheerful. Dear Miss Huldah, how sweet it is to see you again!"

She held up a peach-tinted cheek for Miss Huldah to kiss. It was a very pretty cheek, in spite of the palpable traces of powder, and Miss Huldah kissed it and sighed.

But she recovered her spirits before they reached the house, and, completely won over by Mrs. Damien's pretty ways, she closed her eyes to the bleached hair and unseemly dress, and, remembering only that she was the gay Mildred they all used to love, she very rashly disclosed to her the scheme for her nephew's settlement in life.

There was an eager flash in Mrs. Damien's eyes before the lashes modestly fell.

"Dear Miss Huldah, if such happiness *could* be possible! You know that I revere dear Sir Gerald as one of the noblest of men! His wife will be a greatly-to-be-envied woman."

She said very little more on the subject; but Miss Huldah gathered from her words that she was not unwilling, and she was rampant with satisfaction.

Probably Mrs. Damien's most prominent feeling was also satisfaction, when she found herself in the lovely old drawing-room, waited on and petted by the two kindly old women. And when Sir Gerald made his appearance, grave and courtly, and unaffectedly glad to see his old friend again, she was radiant with smiles. But when the door opened again, and Miss Morrison entered, Mrs. Damien's smiles grew rather fixed. The girl had been for a run in the park, and her cheeks were crimsoned by the boisterous wind, and her dark hair ruffled into a pretty disorder. She acknowledged the introduction to the visitor with a slight inclination, then unaffectedly tossed off her hat, and sat down at the little tea-table the servant placed beside her.

Mrs. Damien looked at her resentfully.

"Who is she?" she whispered to Miss Huldah. "One of the Deely Morrisons?"

"No, dear ; she is Gerald's amanuensis—such a very charming girl!" Mrs. Damien exclaimed in horror :

"My dear Miss Huldah, is it possible that you permit her to live here on terms of equality—quite like a daughter in the house? You take my breath away!"

"She is a clergyman's daughter," said Miss Huldah stiffly—"a lady by birth."

"My dear friend, they all call themselves the daughters of professional men now—it's quite the general thing."

And then Sir Gerald came across with Mrs. Damien's tea. But in the midst of her gay chatter with her host, the little widow looked at the trim figure sitting behind the Queen Anne tea-things, and said to herself, "That girl must go."

The diplomacy of Miss Huldah was not needed. With an audacity that struck the old ladies dumb, Mrs. Damien laid siege to Sir Gerald. Miss Morrison's post as amanuensis became a sinecure. Work was an impossibility. If they attempted anything, the little widow would come sparkling and laughing into the library and drag Sir Gerald away. "He must bring his violin to the music-room. Or would he give her another lesson in billiards? Or they must walk to that delightful mountain you could see from the drawing-room window." And so, in one way or another, she contrived to monopolise the giant share of his time. At first Miss Huldah was elated ; then she became rather silent. For Mrs. Damien, not content with monopolising Sir Gerald, wanted to reign as queen in the old house before the crown had ever been offered to her. She was always insinuating in the prettiest way possible that her friends were "behind the times."

So Miss Huldah grew morose ; and Miss Bona began to stay more and more in her own little sitting-room in the West Wing ; and there Persis Morrison would go and sit with her and help her with the charity basket.

"I'm afraid we are not quite as happy as we were," said the old lady timidly one afternoon.

"I know that the 'Ancient Irish Dwellings' is going to the dogs," said Persis gloomily. "It is not my affair, of course, but I am anxious for my master's honour."

Something glistened on her eye-lashes. She whisked it away with the boy's shirt she was making, and went on with her work again.

Then Mrs. Damien went a step further. Under the guise of friendship and anxiety for the welfare of Persis, she gently hinted that Sir Gerald's amanuensis was angling for Sir Gerald himself, and that her presumption was apparent to everybody.

Persis was furious ; but she mastered her honest rage, and showed a calm face to the enemy. But the morning after this she went to the little sitting-room, and first bound Miss Huldah and Miss Bona to secrecy. Then she said sadly :

"I am going to leave you."

Miss Bona burst into tears, and Miss Huldah sat down and stared aghast.

"I am not wanted here, and I must go—indeed, I must go. I am not happy here. I thought once of going early this morning, but I could not at the last without speaking to you."

"My child," said Miss Bona tremulously, "you must not leave us. No daughter could be dearer. Huldah, she must not go!"

"No," said Miss Huldah fiercely, "she shall not go."

Persis turned her head away.

"Don't make it harder," she said faintly. "Dear, kind friends, don't make it harder! Don't ask me to stay another day with—"

"Not one day, but for all the days to come," said a deep voice.

Sir Gerald was standing in the doorway, his eyes fixed on Persis with a look in them that made the hearts of the maiden aunts stir in their bosoms.

"Not for one day, but for all the days to come. You will not leave us, Persis?"

He had never called her "Persis" before. She trembled all over. He went across to her and took her small cold hand; but she drew it away, and answered quietly: "I cannot stay, Sir Gerald!"

"Not as my wife, dear? Am I too old and dull? A gray-haired man is no husband for a young, bright girl; but I love you, my child, so dearly!"

"Love me!" she said unsteadily. The blood came in a scarlet rush to her cheeks, and the staring look left her eyes. "But Mrs. Damien!"

"Mrs. Damien! What has Mrs. Damien to do with us? She is our guest, and a very exacting one. I am afraid she has outstayed even my aunts' welcome."

He looked across at poor Miss Huldah, and smiled.

"Come, Persis, have you no answer for me? Will you stay?"

"I will stay."

"As my wife, Persis?"

"As your wife," breathed the girl softly, and turning towards him she held out her hands. Up whirled Miss Huldah and pounced upon her, and looked searchingly into her face.

"You love him, Persis? Love him for himself alone?"

The girl would have resented this from anyone else; but she knew Miss Huldah. For answer she bent her head and kissed the man's hand that held hers so closely.

"Then God bless you!" said Miss Huldah solemnly. "I said there was no one here fit to be Gerald's wife, and she *was* here with us—the one we love. Come away, Bona; I'm a happy old woman—so are you. Thank God, my matchmaking has 'gang agley'!"

ELIZABETH M. MOON.

BEAUTY FOR ASHES.

A HEAP of dust and ashes ! Waste—decay—
 Unwelcome to the senses ; to the soul
 Hinting at things unlovely ! Voiceless dole
 Breathes in the air ; and quick we turn away,
 Asking why earth, so rich in beauty's dower,
 Should suffer cloud like this over her sky to lower.

The forests shed
 In brilliant gold and red
 Their autumn leaves, and still we heave a sigh :
 But when those leaves lie mouldering by-and-by
 On their damp bed,
 The gay tints fled for aye,
 We shudder at the crumbling mass, and weep
 For dear ones laid aside in their long winter sleep.

Is all then refuse ?
 Is there no more use
 In these dead elements of things once fair ?
 Are Nature's forces squandered ? Shall despair
 Lay its ice-grip upon the human breast,
 And linger ever there a hated guest ?

“ Not so,”
 A herald voice proclaims—
 “ The noblest aims
 Are oftentimes reached by seeming overthrow.
 Wealth yet untold
 May Science from yon dust-heap bid arise ;
 Colours to gladden wondering artist eyes ;
 Perfumes as sweet
 As yield the flowers nursed by kind rain and heat ;
 Flavours as rare
 As of the fruits the far-famed orchard bore
 Guarded by the Hesperides of yore.

“ Our withered hopes do but enrich the ground
 Whereon they fall
 And help to raise full crops upon their mound.
 The funeral pall
 That covers aspiration, joy and love
 Is but a sheltering veil from the too dazzling light above.

“ Defeat, disgrace, yea, almost wrong and crime—
 Shall we dare guess ?
 May bear, as widens out the gracious course of time—
 If the good Hand will bless—
 In their decay a strong New Life, to climb
 Up to the Eternal Realms of Peace and Righteousness.”

EMMA RHODES.

